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"First and foremost, I'm a mom!": the experience of full-time and part-time stay-at-home mothering

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**“First and foremost, I’m a mom!”:
The experience of full-time and part-time stay-at-home mothering**

by

Jennifer Dawn Riday

**A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Major: Human Development and Family Studies

**Program of Study Committee:
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Ames, Iowa

2003

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For the Major Program

*Dedicated to all mothers who have sacrificed a portion of themselves
to enable, empower, and exnoble*

the next generation

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ABSTRACT

This purpose of this research was to explore the lived experiences of married, college-educated stay-at-home mothers who had postponed or cancelled full-time careers to either stay at home full-time (n = 7) or to work part-time (n = 7). All mothers had either one or two children under the age of 5 and were married. Using qualitative research methods, detailed and personal information was obtained through individual interviews with each mother relating to the rewards and challenges of full-time or part-time stay-at-home mothering, factors influencing the decision to stay at home, “good” mothering, social contact and free time, the marriage relationship and division of household labor/child rearing, child care, and future goals and plans. All interviews were transcribed, and individual descriptive summaries, as well as composite theme analyses were compiled and are presented in this report. Informants also completed questionnaires measuring demographic information, self-esteem, general life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and satisfaction with the mothering role; the scores on these measures were used descriptively. Findings indicate that although college-educated full-time and part-time stay-at-home mothers have unique feelings and experiences relating to their roles as mothers, both are largely satisfied with their life arrangements. Important implications for future research and application are discussed.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

I...wanted to share with you a quote from Jackie Kennedy Onassis: "If you bungle raising your children, I don't think whatever else you do well matters very much." I think that is why most of those of us who decide to dedicate a season of our lives to raising our children do it. My children are my most significant and lasting contribution to the world. I want to do my best for them. (Kalleen)

A significant number of women today choose to be stay-at-home mothers, at least for some portion of their children's lives. Research indicates that over one third of mothers with children under the age of 6 are not employed, and this number is even higher for mothers with a child under the age of 1 year (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001d; Cohen & Bianchi, 1999). A large number of mothers also choose to work part time rather than full time. One report indicated that among mothers ages 15-44 who had an infant, 17% worked part-time, 34% worked full time, and 45% stayed at home full time (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001b).

Some research suggests that many mothers with young children give up full-time jobs or reduce the number of hours they work in order to minimize work-family conflict, to have greater amounts of time with their children, and to preserve a sense of control over their children's lives (Waldfogel, 1997; Dyck, 1992). Many stay-at-home mothers also want to reduce or eliminate the amount of time their children spend in child care and believe that staying at home is beneficial for their children (Zimmerman, 2000; Cattani, 1991). Some authors suggest that today's mothers also experience feelings of guilt when they do not live up to the socially-constructed image of "good" mothering, which prescribes that mothers should be continuously available for and responsive to their children (Eyer, 1996; Hays, 1996). Clearly, a number of factors influence a mother's decision to stay at home or to work part time.

Although a large number of mothers choose to stay at home for a variety of reasons, the experiences of stay-at-home mothers in particular are not completely understood. Most studies have only considered portions of the phenomenon of mothering using samples that generally do not differentiate between mothers who are employed or who stay at home. Some topics that have been

examined include the division of household labor and child rearing responsibilities between mothers and fathers (Zimmerman & Addison, 1997; Blair & Johnson, 1992; DeMeis & Perkins, 1996), mothers' feelings of isolation and their interactions with social support networks (Bell & Ribbens, 1994; Dyck, 1992), feelings of stress, satisfaction, and well-being (Rose, Newman, Bennett, & Tyroler, 1999; Baruch & Barnett, 1986), and the experiences associated with combining the working and mothering roles (Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, & Crouter, 2000; Walker & Best, 1991). Researchers and society alike continue to have mixed opinions regarding whether motherhood is a source of fulfillment and personal development or a cause of oppression, distress, and anxiety (Bassin, Honey, & Kaplan, 1994; Arendell, 2000).

Further research needs to examine topics such as these specifically using samples of stay-at-home mothers. Understanding the experience of stay-at-home mothering is important because motherhood is no longer what it was just 30 years ago. Today the average woman marries later in life or not at all, has fewer children or none at all, and has children later in life (Glass, 1992). Additionally, a greater number of women are obtaining college degrees, are employed, and have more liberal gender role ideologies (Spain & Bianchi, 1996; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001c). As a result, modern-day mothers experience social norms, pressures, and benefits relating to their mothering roles that may not be comparable to mothers from any other period in history.

The social science field would also be greatly benefited by increased amounts of qualitative research examining the phenomenon of modern-day stay-at-home mothering. Although much of past research is enlightening, most published research focusing on motherhood and mothering has utilized quantitative research methods and has measured only a handful of predictor variables, thereby providing a relatively incomplete picture of motherhood. In contrast, qualitative research can provide a holistic, in-depth view of mothers' experiences by allowing informants to speak openly about any subject or experience they feel is related to mothering, and it can help to generate more accurate

theories and hypotheses regarding those topics (Weiss, 1994). According to Lofland (1971), qualitative methods allow researchers and readers of research to “take the role of the other” and

...know the petty vexations of [informants'] existence, the disappointments that befall them, the joys and triumphs they savor, the typical contingencies they face. There is a conveyance of their prides, their shames, their secrets, their fellowships, their boredoms, their happinesses, their despairs. (p. 4)

Gaining an in-depth understanding of stay-at-home mothering is not only important for science, but it is important for me personally. After the birth of my first child I became a new person within a period of weeks as I fell in love with an irresistible little person who was completely dependent on me. As a mother I have experienced an amazing combination of wonderful, astonishing, demanding, and challenging circumstances and occurrences which I believe no non-mother could wholly understand. I have often been left breathless by the whirlwind of balancing motherhood with graduate school and the many other roles I fill in life and have questioned how other mothers balance working and mothering, as well as what life would be like if I chose to be a stay-at-home mother or a mother who works part time.

My experiences have led me to ask some important and little-understood questions, such as the following: *What influences a mother's decision to work or to stay at home with her children? Do stay-at-home mothers feel fulfilled and satisfied with their lives? Does working add something to a mother's life that she cannot experience at home? How does marital quality influence a mother's experience with stay-at-home mothering? What is a typical day like for a stay-at-home mother?* I have also become interested in what I believe is a sub-group of stay-at-home mothers: namely, mothers who work part-time. Like mothers who choose to stay at home full time, many mothers choose part-time employment so they can minimize work-family conflict and maximize the amount of time they spend with their children (Waldfoegel, 1997). I suspect that the experiences of mothers who stay at home full time and mothers who are employed part time are quite similar. However, some studies suggest that part-time employment may add something to a mother's life that would be

missing if she solely stayed at home. For example, research shows that women who work feel more control over their lives and feel a greater sense of self-esteem (Walker & Best, 1991; Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1992).

I am also particularly interested in highly educated mothers who choose to stay at home or work part time rather than full time. Data suggest that most college-educated women choose to have careers. Specifically, U.S. census data show that in the year 2000, 82% of all women who had graduated from college were employed (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001a). However, I have met a large number of women with college educations who choose to be stay-at-home mothers or to postpone full-time careers and work part-time while their children are young. In their book *What's a Smart Woman Like You Doing at Home?*, Burton, Dittmer, and Loveless (1992) suggest that increasing numbers of highly educated women are choosing to stay at home rather than work largely because of inflexible employers, problems with child care, and a general desire to be available for their children. I believe this topic needs further exploration.

In order to better understand why many highly educated women choose to stay at home or to work part time, as well as to understand their personal experiences with mothering, I have conducted this qualitative research which describes and represent the lived experiences of mothers who stay at home full time and mothers who work part time (or stay at home part time). This research has not only benefited me personally, but it provides in-depth information that can enlighten and transform society's socially-constructed image of stay-at-home mothers. Additionally, this research provides a foundation from which new theories, hypotheses and research regarding mothering can be generated. Finally, family therapists, social workers, teachers, and other professionals can benefit from this research as they learn more about the unique challenges and opportunities that mothers who stay at home part time and full time face in their daily lives.

Research Question

The primary question of this research is *What is the lived experience of full-time and part-time stay-at-home mothers?* This question was deliberately worded to make motherhood, rather than work, the primary reference. I feel this choice of words places more emphasis and respect on the mothering role rather than on employment. I define a full-time stay-at-home mother as a mother who spends the majority of her time caring for her children and who does not work outside the home. In contrast, I define a part-time stay-at-home mother as a mother who still spends the majority of her time caring for her children while also holding a part-time job outside the home. I realize that many people, as well as the majority of the research literature, often refer to women in these roles as “homemakers” and “mothers who work part time,” so I use a combination of these references throughout this report.

I attempted to answer this research question about the lived experiences of full-time and part-time stay-at-home mothers by conducting interviews with seven full-time and seven part-time stay-at-home mothers. All the informants were married, had at least one child under the age of 5, had obtained a college degree, described themselves as middle class, and had been raised in the United States. Although such a homogeneous sample certainly limits the generalizability of the results of this study, it provides an in-depth picture of the experiences of many full-time and part-time stay-at-home mothers in our society. Each mother talked freely about topics such as (a) the factors that influenced her decision to stay at home full time or part time, (b) her daily experiences, (c) her feelings about herself and her role as a mother, (d) interactions with others, including her friends, family, husband, and children, and (e) her goals for the future. Additionally, this research assessed general demographic information, mothers’ feelings of self-esteem, and mothers’ sense of satisfaction with their mothering role, with their marriages, and with life in general.

Organization of This Report

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the conceptual and historical framework surrounding motherhood, including how society's images of motherhood and mothering are socially constructed and have evolved throughout history, as well as a review of the research literature relating to this research. Chapter 3 details the qualitative, phenomenological research methods of data collection and data analysis I employed in this research. In Chapter 4 I present detailed information about each individual mother I interviewed. Individual demographic profiles are presented in tabular format, and detailed narrative descriptions of each informant's personal experiences of mothering are provided. These descriptions contain several quotations from each mother, providing an in-depth portrayal of each mother's personality, beliefs, and personal experiences relating to areas such as marriage, division of household labor, daily life, and other important topics. Chapters 5 and 6 contain composite descriptions of the lived experiences of full-time and part-time stay-at-home mothering respectively. Cross-individual theme analyses for each group of mothers resulted in seven major themes. These themes, along with relevant sub-themes are presented. Finally, in Chapter 7 I discuss the results of this study in light of other research, and present the implications this research has for mothers, practitioners, and future research.

CHAPTER 2. CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The Social Construction of Motherhood and Mothering

The terms *motherhood* and *mothering* are not concrete terms that are easily defined; instead, these concepts vary socially, culturally, and historically. In other words, motherhood and mothering are terms that are socially constructed based on the individual and collective meanings assigned to them at a given time as well as in a given place or among a specific group of people. Hays (1996) states,

Images of children, child rearing, and motherhood do not spring from nature, nor are they random. They are socially constructed. Their natural quality is refuted not only by their variance across persons and places but also by their ever-changing character. And these variations are largely explained by the fact that ideas about child rearing, like all ideas, bear a systematic and intelligible connection to the culture and organization of the society in which they are found. (p. 19)

The social construction of any concept, including mothering, occurs as individuals interact with one another. According to Berger and Luckman (1966), language serves as the primary “bridge” between different individuals’ personal definitions, ideas, and realities regarding specific phenomena, leading to the creation of a collective definition of those concepts. Nevertheless, socially constructed concepts, such as mothering, are never static mainly because individuals constantly have unique experiences that, when transferred through language and other forms of communication, lead to continual transformation of social phenomena.

The theory of social constructionism is a valuable lens through which a study of mothers and mothering can be conducted because it encourages a researcher to gain information verbally, or through the use of language, so that mothers’ unique experiences relating to motherhood and mothering can be portrayed according to their personal constructions of the terms rather than through those of the researcher or society at large. Social constructionism also enables a researcher to recognize that motherhood and mothering are not necessarily biological terms, but rather are fluid concepts that vary across individual, cultural, geographical, and historical boundaries. Additionally,

this theory is a superior means by which social phenomena, such as mothering, can be examined because it allows for in-depth description of experiences and personal interpretations of those experiences. Arendell (2000) states,

Social constructionism offers an exceptionally strong framework for considering mothering and motherhood. The paradigm affords a means for looking at, and taking seriously, interaction, interpretative processes..., social context, and, importantly, relationships. (p. 1202)

Current definitions of mothering within American society are various and complex. Most people would agree that mothering evokes an image of nurturing or taking care of others. For example, Forcey (1994) states that mothering is a “socially constructed set of activities and relationships involved in nurturing and caring for people.” She adds that mothering is also “the main vehicle through which people first form their identities and learn their place in society” (p. 357). In addition, mothering is mostly viewed within society as an act that is directed toward children. Arendell (2000) explains, “Definitions of mothering share a theme: the social practices of nurturing and caring for dependent children” (p. 1192). Finally, mothering is often viewed as the highest form of loyalty and affection. Arendell states, “Multifaceted and complex, mothering is symbolically laden, representing what often is characterized as the ultimate in relational devotion” (p. 1192).

Because definitions of motherhood and mothering are so value-laden within our society, most mothers consider motherhood as more than a biological relationship. Many mothers often feel social pressure to be the ideal mother or to conform to cultural norms of mothering. McMahon (1995) states,

...whether women do or do not become mothers, or mother in ways that veer from the dominant script, cultural images of motherhood provide coercive prescriptions for gender behavior that influence most women’s lives. (p. 25)

Modern-day ideals of mothering include nurturing, affection, and undeviating dedication. Thompson and Walker (1989) reviewed research examining our modern-day socially constructed image of motherhood and concluded,

A woman’s identity is tenuous and trivial without motherhood. A woman enjoys and intuitively knows what to do for her child; she cares for her child without ambivalence or

awkwardness. Motherhood is a constant and exclusive responsibility. A mother is all-giving and all-powerful. Within the “magic circle” of mother and child, the mother devotes herself to her child’s needs and holds her child’s fate in her hands. (p. 860)

Although this devoted image of motherhood is “the norm” or “the ideal” for modern-day mothers, it is interesting to study the evolution of the prevalent social images of motherhood and mothering throughout history. Glenn (1994) said, “Mothering is constructed through men’s and women’s actions within specific historical circumstances” (p. 3). Mothers of today are dramatically different from the average mother who lived even just 30 years ago. The following section, entitled *History of Motherhood and Mothering*, will describe some of the major changes that have occurred in the conventional images of motherhood and mothering throughout the past few centuries.

History of Motherhood and Mothering

Women’s roles in the family have changed significantly throughout the past several hundred years. Throughout the Middle Ages children were often viewed as “demonic, animalistic, ill-formed, and physically fragile,” according to Hays (1996, p. 22). To “control” troublesome children, adults often swaddled, whipped, and even administered opium. Children were also seen largely as a form of labor and were frequently abandoned or ignored. Although parents certainly must have felt some affection toward their children, there seemed to be little honor associated with child rearing and, in Hays’ words, “no belief in a maternal instinct that led mothers to protect and nurture their young” (p. 23).

Prior to the industrial revolution, the family did not exist as a distinct social unit as it tends to today; rather, the household served multiple roles, including a site for education, religious worship, production, and welfare. Extended family members and non-related dependents often lived within the typical household at that time as well (Hareven, 1991). In Colonial America, fathers, played a large role in child rearing because it was believed they were responsible for providing their children with moral training. Puritan ideologies popular during this era taught that fathers were responsible to overcome the inherent sin and evil within their children through strict discipline and training; mothers

were often viewed as sinful, weak, and overly affectionate with their children and therefore were seen as having a less-vital role than men in child rearing (Eyer, 1996; Hays, 1996).

As a result of increasing industrialization throughout the 1800s, a new idea of the family began to emerge among the bourgeois in France and England that segregated the roles of wife and husband into full-time housekeeper and breadwinner, respectively. Men were more often absent from the home as they became engaged in industry and politics. As a result, the home became a private haven in which reading, music, and sewing became important pastimes, and women gradually became the “hearth angels” of the home whose primary role was to morally train their children (Hareven, 1991; Eyer, 1996). Motherhood and child rearing began to be equated and the home became a feminine haven where children could feel secure. Chase and Rogers (2001) explain, “The economic sphere was thought of as masculine and competitive, and as requiring rugged individualism, while the home was supposed to offer feminine warmth and shelter...” (p. 63).

With this new definition of home, it became the norm for middle-class women to make homemaking their top priority. Books on household etiquette were written and the idealization of the role of housewife began. Hareven (1991) explains, “Homemaking was idealized as part of the cult of domesticity, and was accorded special social status” (p. 261). She added, “Women were expected to be the perfect designers, executors, and custodians of the new domestic retreat” (p. 262). Ideal mothers of this era raised virtuous children and future leaders who could serve their nation (Chase & Rogers, 2001). During this time people predominantly began to believe that children needed protection from the “evils of the world”; children were less frequently sent to work as apprentices and instead were kept at home or were sent to school (Hays, 1996). Additionally philosophers such as Locke and Rousseau popularized the idea that children were good and innocent and needed early training that progressed along with a child’s development (Hays, 1996; Eyer, 1996).

By the late 19th century, many middle-class Americans felt the urge to move away from urban life to experience a more tranquil existence in the suburbs (Hareven, 1991). Although this change

may have been beneficial in several ways, many scholars claim that it led to the isolation of mothers. Hareven states, "The new domesticity in the suburbs led to the isolation of women and children from urban life, and eventually to the entrapment of women in suburban domestic life-styles" (p. 271). The turn of the century also brought changes in child rearing ideologies. Specifically, child rearing began to be treated as a science, largely through child "experts" such as Dr. Luther Emmett Holt, Dr. G. Stanley Hall, and Dr. John Watson. These men prescribed that children needed to be trained and not indulged, and suggested that "good" behavior should be rewarded while "bad" behavior should be punished. Such "experts" also suggested that mothers should not hug, kiss, or hold their children, and that children should only be picked up according to feeding and changing schedules (Hays, 1996; Eyer, 1996).

By the mid-20th century, a permissive, indulgent child rearing ideology had replaced the behaviorist theories popular earlier in the century. Child rearing "authorities" of this period suggested that maternal affection and involvement were healthy for child development. Psychologists such as Freud and Erikson, who explained childish behaviors such as thumb-sucking as largely instinct-driven and natural, or Piaget, who listed stages of children's cognitive development, had a strong influence on parents. Additionally, Bowlby's attachment theory prescribed that mothers should be consistently available for and affectionate toward their children in order to ensure optimal mental and emotional health of their children throughout their development. Unfortunately, fathers were becoming increasingly involved in industrial mass production and spent greater amounts of time outside the home and as a result were viewed as secondary to mothers in the rearing of their children (Eyer, 1996).

Throughout the early to mid-20th century, and particularly with the onset of World War II, an increasing number of mothers began to be employed outside the home. However, this trend was slowed as "experts" criticized mothers for neglecting their children and as men returned to their places of employment following the war (Eyer, 1996). Nevertheless, the number of women in

positions of paid employment never ceased to increase. Claes, Martin, Coetsier, and Super (1995) suggest that this change was due to a growing service sector, a growing number of part-time jobs, lower birth rates, increased education for women, changing gender-role attitudes, and greater numbers of divorced and single women who needed to work out of economic necessity. Etaugh (1990) provides a similar explanation, stating,

Rising educational levels of women have given them access to more attractive, higher paying jobs. In addition, service occupations expanded after World War II. These jobs—including those of teacher, nurse, librarian, social worker, and clerical worker—have traditionally attracted a high proportion of female workers. The supply of young, single women who had filled these positions in the past was not large enough to keep up with the growing demand for female labor, and married women were increasingly drawn into the work force. (p. 57)

By the mid-1960s, full-time homemaking became financially unfeasible for a growing number of families; as a result, the number of employed mothers has steadily increased ever since. More women work outside the home today than ever before. Demographic data show that in 1970 40% of married women with children under the age of 18 worked, while in 2000 that number had increased to 71%. Similarly, reports show that 30% of all mothers with infants under the age of six were employed in 1970; that number reached 63% in the year 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001c). According to Etaugh (1990) the number of women who are employed has risen because women are more likely to obtain higher educations, to marry later in life or not at all, to cohabitate, to divorce, and to have children later in life or to remain childless. In addition, housework demands have decreased due to increased mechanization, and typical gender-role ideologies have shifted to a norm that is somewhat less-traditional.

By the 1980s so many mothers were in the work force that a new mothering model emerged. The idealized “supermom” of this era was expected to manage working and mothering with minimal stress through the use of superior time management techniques (Eyer, 1996). This model continues to be prevalent in society today. However, employed women also continue to feel social pressure to make their family their top priority. Top-selling child rearing authors, including Dr. Benjamin Spock,

Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, and Penelope Leach, recommend that “good” mothers should be affectionate, devoted, self-sacrificing and make their children their highest priority in life (Hays, 1996; Eyer, 1996). Some “experts” even suggest that good mothers should stay at home rather than be employed, causing many employed mothers to feel less accepted or respected within society. Chase and Rogers (2001) state.

In recent years, middle-class mothers who work outside the home have achieved begrudging acceptance from the society at large, as long as their children remain their top priority. But the married, middle-class, stay-at-home mother remains a resilient icon of good mothering. (p. 70)

As a result of this social “icon of good mothering,” many women also feel a sense of guilt for being employed (Eyer, 1996).

Interestingly, however, recent research has also shown that mothers who stay at home full time rather than working outside the home also experience some feelings of social disapproval or pressure. Zimmerman (2000) interviewed several full-time stay-at-home mothers and found that most reported feeling that society did not appreciate their stay-at-home mothering role because they were not performing more “challenging” work and were “wasting their educations” by being home with their children. Feelings such as these are not surprising given that the normative idea of the family is gradually transforming as more women work and as increasing numbers of women find stay-at-home mothering undesirable or impossible to fulfill. Lopata, Barnewolt, & Harrison (1987) also suggest that the stay-at-home mother role is not always highly esteemed because technology has simplified the homemaker role, many women are able to fulfill homemaker responsibilities while holding a full-time job and no salary or wage is received for fulfilling homemaker tasks.

Clearly, motherhood has changed dramatically throughout history, and the norms associated with mothering at any point in time have strongly determined the ways in which mothers have interacted with their children and spouses, as well as with society in general. Social norms and ideals continue to influence modern-day mothers’ identities, priorities, and perceptions of their experiences.

Motherhood and Mothering: Literature Review

Much research has examined women's experiences with motherhood and mothering. In this section I discuss some of the dominant areas of study that have added to our understanding of modern-day mothers. Specifically, I discuss (a) demographic information such as the increase in the number of mothers who are employed, (b) information about child care and how it influences mothers who are employed, (c) how women make the decision to be stay-at-home mothers or to be employed, (d) images of "good" mothering, (e) perceived positives and negatives associated with stay-at-home mothering and being a mother who is employed, (f) mothers' experiences of isolation and social support, and (g) division of household labor and child rearing responsibilities, the marriage relationship, and gender roles. The research findings and theories associated with each of these topics will enable the reader of this research to more clearly evaluate and interpret the experience of stay-at-home mothering.

Demographic Information

Research has shown that the number of women in America who are employed is on the rise. Reports show that 40% of married women with children under the age of 18 were employed either full or part time in 1970, while in 2000 that number had increased to 71%. Similarly, for married mothers with young children under the age of 6, 30% were employed in 1970 and 63% were employed in 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001c). Cohen and Bianchi (1999) reported that 27% of all women ages 16-64 worked full time in 1978; that number rose to 42% in 1997. They also found that the average annual number of hours all women ages 16-64 were employed for pay rose 38% between 1978 and 1998.

Nevertheless, despite rising employments rates for women in general, a large number of mothers of small children continue to stay at home full time. Demographic data show that 37% of mothers with children under the age of 6 were not employed in the year 2000, and this number is even higher among mothers with children under the age of 1 (42%) (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001d).

Cohen and Bianchi (1999) similarly reported that in 1998, only 35% of married mothers of young children worked full time; they also reported that stay-at-home mothers constitute about one third of all married mothers with preschool-aged children. Research also provides some indication of the proportion of mothers who are employed part time, full time, or who are not employed at all. One report showed that in June of 2000 among mothers ages 15-44 years old who had an infant, 34% were employed full time, 17% were employed part time, and 45% were not employed at all (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001b). Clearly, despite rising employment trends among women, stay-at-home mothers who stay at home either full time or part time continue to make up a large portion of our population.

Research suggests that stay-at-home mothers and mothers who are employed either full or part time differ in some ways. First, as would be expected, it has been found that stay-at-home mother/breadwinner-father households tend to have lower household incomes than dual-earner households. In 1997, the median household income of all two-parent, dual-earner families was \$59,900, while the median household income of all two-parent families in which only the father was employed was \$42,040 (Casper & Bianchi, 2002). Additionally, some studies show that employed women and homemakers differ on measures of educational attainment. Glass (1992) analyzed data from the General Social Surveys to explore characteristics that typify housewives and women employed full time and part time and determined that women employed full time had higher levels of education than homemakers. Lopata et al. (1987) utilized a sample of 1,877 residents from the Midwest and likewise reported that homemakers had attained lower levels of education than working women. Findings from studies like these seem somewhat intuitive given that higher educational attainment is generally related to higher-quality and higher paying jobs, potentially providing encouragement for highly educated mothers to work. However, some authors suggest that increasing numbers of educated women are choosing to stay at home with their children (Burton et al., 1992), although, little empirical research has addressed this topic.

Child Care

As more mothers work outside the home and as a result are unable to care for their children during their hours of employment, more children are being cared for by non-parental caregivers than at any other time in American history (Casper & Bianchi, 2002). Sources of non-parental child care include organized child care facilities, in which a classroom of children is cared for in a more structured school-like environment; family day care, in which a few children are cared for by a non-related adult in that adult's home; in-home care, in which one or more children are cared for in their home by a non-related adult; and care by relatives, including fathers, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and even older siblings.

Demographic reports provide some indication of the types of care children receive during the hours their mothers spend in paid employment. One report showed that in 1993 almost half of all children under the age of 5 who had a regular child care arrangement while their mothers worked were cared for by relatives. Specifically 17% were cared for by grandparents, 16% by fathers, and 9% by other relatives, while 6% were cared for by their mothers while their mothers worked. The remainder of children were cared for by care providers in organized child care facilities (30%) by in-home and family care providers (21%), or by other arrangements (1%). This report also stated that among mothers who specifically worked part time rather than full time, arrangement of child care by relatives was easier for mothers who worked part time rather than full time. For women employed part time and full time respectively, care by fathers was 25% and 11%, and care by other relatives was 33% and 31%. In contrast, use of organized child care facilities for children of part-time and full-time employed mothers correspondingly was 24% and 35%, and use of either in-home or family child care for part-time and full-time employed mothers respectively was 28% and 23% (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996).

Families pay significantly more for child care today than they did in the past. One study found that after adjusting for inflation, dual-income families spent on average \$85 weekly on child

care in 1995, while the average family only spent \$59 per week in 1985 (Casper & Bianchi, 2002). Unfortunately high child care costs may not necessarily ensure high quality care. Although greater numbers of parents are specifically seeking high-quality child care in order to promote their children's social, cognitive, emotional development (Casper & Bianchi, 2002), research indicates that American child care as a whole is the worst of the entire Western world (Eyer, 1996). A majority of child care facilities in the U.S. operate with little government regulation, poorly trained and paid care providers, low adult-child ratios, and high staff turnover rates, causing many parents to feel a sense of guilt or remorse from leaving their children with child care providers (Casper & Bianchi, 2002; Eyer, 1996).

"Good" Mothering

Much of the guilt mothers feel for placing their children in child care stems largely from social images of "good" mothering. As I mentioned in the section entitled *The History of Motherhood and Mothering*, predominant ideologies of "ideal" or "good" mothering have existed throughout history and have become particularly influential throughout the 20th century. In her book *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, Hays (1996) describes how most modern-day mothers adhere to an ideology of *intensive mothering*, a philosophy which prescribes that mothers should spend large amounts of energy, time, and money in rearing their children. She states,

The model of intensive mothering tells us that children are innocent and priceless, that their rearing should be carried out primarily by individual mothers and that it should be centered on children's needs, with methods that are informed by experts, labor-intensive, and costly. This, we are told, is the best model, largely because it is what children need and deserve. (p. 21)

Hays suggests that this ideology of intensive mothering largely originated with three top-selling authors: Dr. Spock, T. Berry Brazelton, and Penelope Leach. As I previously mentioned, each of these authors places considerable emphasis on the importance of maternal warmth and mother-child bonding, and they recommend complete dedication by mothers to meeting their children's needs. Hays conducted interviews with 38 mothers of young children and concluded that the majority of her

sample harbored a deep commitment to the intensive mothering ideology prescribed by such popular authors.

In her book *Motherguilt* Eyer (1996) also discusses the child rearing philosophies of Brazelton, Leach, and Dr. Spock, as well as other child rearing “experts.” Eyer believes that most contemporary authorities on child rearing suggest that a “good” mother should stay at home rather than enter the work force, breastfeed her children on demand, and feel perfectly satisfied and fulfilled with her mothering role. This mothering ideal, she proposes, is impossible for mothers to attain. She states,

The experts’ image of the Good Mother is more like a religious icon than a flesh-and-blood woman. Most baby books describe this mother as if she really spends her entire day doing nothing but beaming at a cooing baby and playing developmentally appropriate games to stimulate intelligence and self-confidence. The virtuous mother is allowed the occasional outburst of anger, of course, which the gurus help her manage, but never chronic frustration with the isolation and tedium that often attends child rearing. (p. 7)

Although this modern-day “good-mother” ideal likely helps many mothers aspire to parenting practices that really do facilitate their children’s development, this image is also more of an ethereal icon than a reality, causing many mothers to experience a sense of guilt as they live with a vivid sense of their own maternal shortcomings in relation to this “ideal.”

Employed mothers in particular face a great deal of guilt largely because they are led to believe they are harming the mother-child bond by working and because they are leaving child rearing responsibilities to daycare providers. This guilt is only magnified by large amounts of social science research that have attempted to “prove” that maternal employment is harmful for children and families (for reviews of the research examining maternal employment see Arendell, 2000 and Perry-Jenkins et al., 2000). Interestingly, much of this research has yielded mixed results and certainly does not indicate a robust negative effect of maternal employment on children that the media or other sources often portray (Bianchi, 2000). Interestingly, Bianchi suggests that employed mothers actually do *not* spend significantly less time with their children than stay-at-home mothers, largely because

stay-at-home mothers do not spend their entire day engaging primarily with their children, instead spending some time on household tasks and other activities; while employed mothers often reduce the amount of time spent in areas such as volunteer work, sleep, and hobbies in order to have more one-on-one time solely with their children.

Factors Influencing a Mother's Choice to Stay at Home or to Be Employed

Many studies show that a number of factors influence a woman's decision to stay at home with her children or to be employed. Some women may choose not to work or to reduce their hours of employment because they earn significantly less money than men. One study found that in 1995, women's hourly pay was 79% of men's, and measures of annual earnings showed that women employed full earned 71% of what their male counterparts did (Casper & Bianchi, 2002). Research by Waldfogel (1997) suggests many mothers also stop working or reduce hours at work in order to reduce work-family conflict and to preserve a sense of control over their children's lives.

Dyck (1992) interviewed 25 women from British Columbia, Canada who had previously worked but had since decided to cease working and found that the primary reasons these mothers cited for ending their employment was to spend time with their children, health status, commuting time and distance, a desire to be available for children after school, and issues with finding high quality child care. Cattan (1991) utilized data from young mothers ages 21-29 and similarly found that almost 9% of mothers not employed in 1986 did not work due to an issue with child care. This number was even higher for women who were from low-income families, who had three or more children, or who had very young children.

Some studies have ascertained that religious orientation and level of devoutness influence a woman's decision to be employed or to stay at home (Sherkat, 2000; Morgan & Scanzoni, 1987). Zimmerman (2000) conducted interviews with 24 homemaker-mother/career-father families and found that most of the informants reported that religion and family were the main influences for choosing to stay at home with their children and that any financial sacrifices required for staying

home with their children were worthwhile because they believed their children benefited from maternal care. Some studies also suggest that women consider homemaking and mothering as more important than working, which may either directly or indirectly influence their decision to work or stay at home (i.e., Claes et al., 1995).

Some women also work primarily for the financial benefits of employment or even consider employment an economic necessity for their families (Bianchi, 1995; Herring & Wilson-Sadberry, 1993). Herring and Wilson-Sadberry (1993) also found that in addition to financial reasons, many women also work out of personal preference. Specifically, they found that working out of preference was more likely among women with high levels of education and less likely among married mothers with young children. Finally, some researchers suggest that many women work largely due to social norms or social pressure (Bassin et al., 1994).

Perceived Positives and Negatives of Mothering, Homemaking, and Employment

The experience of motherhood can easily be dichotomized into positives and negatives. Not only can mothering be stressful and physically and emotionally demanding, but it can simultaneously be fulfilling and satisfying. Several authors have described both sides of the continuum of mothering. For example, Bassin et al. (1994) suggest that motherhood can not only be viewed as a source of psychological development and satisfaction for mothers, but it can also be seen as oppressive, devaluating, and isolating. Arendell similarly (2000) states that "mothering is a font of personal fulfillment, growth, and joy, on the one hand, and one of distress, depression, and anxiety, on the other" (p. 1196). Thompson and Walker (1989) reviewed research relating to the experiences of mothering and concluded,

Most mothers find looking after small children a predominantly unsettling and irritating experience. The constant vigilance and the tedium of occupying children who are unreasonable and self-centered takes its toll on mothers. Children interfere with mothers' other activities (such as housework), confine mothers to home, and require routines that help mothers feel less overwhelmed, but also more restricted. On the other hand, most mothers voice the sense of meaning, purpose, fulfillment, commitment, and value children bring to life. Mothers typically focus their hopes, dreams, and ambitions on their children and strive to

give their children the things they missed when they were young. But mostly mothers' sense of purpose is founded on feeling needed by and essential to their children. It is important to mothers' sense of personal worth that children want and depend upon them in particular. (p. 861-862)

Research provides support for the positive-negative dichotomy of mothering suggested by such researchers. For example, Zimmerman (2000) interviewed several mothers from stay-at-home mother/breadwinner-father families and found that although the mothers in her study believed their mothering role was important and beneficial for their children, they often felt undervalued and disapproved of by society because they were not doing more "challenging" work; they also reported experiencing high levels of stress and exhaustion, which, interestingly, they attributed to high expectations that were mainly self-imposed.

Other studies suggest that mothers find their homemaking and mothering roles quite rewarding. For example, Lopata et al. (1987) measured a sample of 798 full-time homemakers ages 25-54, the majority of whom were mothers, and found that 47% considered parenting and homemaking as "'the best job' they will ever hold," (p. 224); a majority of this sample also viewed their mothering role as important and complex and believed that the household would not run smoothly without them. Kiecok (2003) used data from the 1973-1994 General Social Surveys and found that an increasing number of mothers, particularly mothers with children under age 6, shifted from reporting work as more satisfying than home to reporting home as a haven.

Combining mothering with employment can also be viewed according to a positive-negative dichotomy. Perry-Jenkins et al. (2000) discuss two hypotheses relating to merging working and mothering roles. One hypothesis suggests that women simultaneously balancing motherhood and working experience greater stress and declines in well-being and physical health, while the opposite—the "expansion hypothesis"—proposes that combining working with mothering can be rewarding because it provides income, higher self-esteem, power, and social opportunities. Different studies examining mothers' employment status and stress levels provide support for each of these

hypotheses. For example, one study compared hypertension levels of 3,824 women ages 25-64 who were either homemakers, employed full time, employed part time, or employed in short-term jobs and found that women employed part time showed significantly lower hypertension levels than homemakers and women employed full time (Rose et al., 1999). Other studies have also found that employed women report higher levels of self-esteem than homemakers (Lopata et al., 1987; Baruch & Barnett, 1986). These studies seem to support the “expansion hypothesis,” which suggests that working can be beneficial for women.

In contrast, Walker and Best (1991) measured stress levels in 330 mothers with infants ages 2-11 months and found that mothers employed full time reported higher stress levels and less health-promotive lifestyles than did homemakers. They stated that much of the employed mothers’ stress was caused largely by conflicts related to returning to work after the birth of the child, lack of time, overload, fatigue, and infant illness, suggesting that these mothers’ experiences of stress may be related to a lack of sense of control over their lives and an inability to satisfactorily balance multiple roles. This study seems to support the first hypothesis mentioned by Perry-Jenkins et al. (2000), which suggests that combining mothering and working result in increased stress and exhaustion.

Some studies provide detailed descriptions of the rewards and challenges of work and homemaker roles. For example, Baruch and Barnett (1986) administered questionnaires to 238 women ages 35-55, a large majority of whom were mothers, and found that employed women reported the most rewarding facets of their job to be autonomy, feeling a sense of accomplishment, and having an interesting job; the most distressing aspects of employment were having too many things to do, juggling conflicting responsibilities, and little opportunity for career growth. In contrast, homemakers reported the most rewarding aspects of their roles to be the love their children showed, liking themselves as people, and feeling a sense of pleasure in their accomplishments; while the most distressing aspects of their homemaker role were worry about physical health, worry about adolescent members of the family, and financial strain.

The studies I have discussed provide support for the idea that stay-at-home mothers and employed mothers both experience a number of positives and negatives, or rewards and challenges, related to their mothering and employment roles. Interestingly, some research suggests that mothers' feelings of satisfaction with their work and mothering roles are closely related to their reported marital satisfaction and the quality of the home environment. For example, Thompson and Walker (1989) suggest that in general a mother's sense of purpose and satisfaction with her mothering role is directly related to her husband's understanding and appreciation of that role. Similarly, Warr and Parry (1982) reviewed the research of women's psychological well-being and found that the quality of the home environment and the work environment both appear to mediate the relationship between employment status and women's psychological health. A subsequent section of this literature view entitled *Division of Household Labor and Child Rearing, Marital Satisfaction, and Gender Roles* will further address how spouses' behavior can influence mothers' experiences with and feelings toward their mothering and working roles.

Isolation and Social Support

Society's socially-constructed image of the "isolated housewife," although bearing some truth, has existed for several decades. This term may have gained popularity in the 1960s when many housewives began to feel trapped in the home with little adult interaction, and—in extreme cases—were experiencing symptoms of depression and exhaustion which became known as "Housewife's Syndrome" (Eyer, 1996). Although some research has supported the fact that stay-at-home mothers may feel a sense of isolation and loneliness at times, despite opportunities to socialize (i.e., Zimmerman, 2000), the image of the "isolated housewife" may be more of a stereotype than a reality. Some research has found that many mothers have substantial social support networks, made up largely by other mothers, and do not experience the great loneliness attributed to them by popular opinion or the media. Bell and Ribbens (1994) interviewed several stay-at-home and employed mothers in England and found that most reported experiencing a strong social support through their

friendships with other young mothers they interacted with throughout the day as they took their children to activities. The authors suggest that these day-to-day social interactions provided these mothers with multiple opportunities to receive support with their mothering roles and to exchange child rearing information. Interestingly, the authors also found that women who worked full time often felt they did not have the opportunity to form social networks with other mothers because they were generally working during the times that such networks were formed (toddler groups, babysitting circles), thus perhaps introducing a unique type of isolation that may be experienced by working mothers alone.

Dyck (1992) similarly interviewed and analyzed detailed journals of several mothers who were either employed or were homemakers. She similarly found that the majority of mothers created support relationships with other mothers as they interacted in various child-centered activities, relationships which served not only a means of discussing “mothering work,” but as a source of moral support and social interaction. She also found that although employed mothers had less opportunity to create such social support networks, they nonetheless had opportunities to interact with other mothers when they picked their children up at school or when they arranged with neighbors and other social links to assist with transporting their children to extracurricular activities. Clearly additional research needs to continue to address the socially-constructed image of the “isolated housewife” by further examining mothers’ feelings about their stay-at-home mothering role, as well as their descriptions of social support and interaction with other adults.

Division of Household Labor/Child Rearing, Marital Satisfaction, and Gender Roles

Division of household labor, marital satisfaction, and gender roles seem to be closely related in the literature, as well as in the “real-world” lives of stay-at-home mothers and their husbands. The interrelationships among these areas is logical because a person’s gender role ideology largely determines his or her performance of household tasks, which, in turn, can influence his or her

perceptions of the quality of the marital relationship. In this section I describe several studies that examine one or more of these areas.

Dozens of studies have shown that women in general tend to spend a much higher number of hours engaged in housework than men. One study by Blair and Johnson (1992) examining the division of household labor in dual-career and one-career families found that women in dual-career families spent on average 31.06 hours per week engaged in household labor, while husbands spent only 15.28 hours per week. The numbers for single-career households in which only the husband worked are even more discrepant: women in this group spent 42.04 hours per week engaged in household work, while their husbands spent only 12.23 hours per week doing household tasks. Interestingly, these researchers also found that inequality of household labor was also related to depressive symptoms reported by the women in this study. Other studies have reported similar distributions of housework between women and men (i.e., Bianchi, 1995; Mederer, 1993; Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). Women also tend to perform more of the repetitive and tedious household chores, such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, laundry, and child care; while men's household work tends to be irregular, non-routine, and infrequent, including tasks such as taking out the trash, lawn and yard work, and household repairs (Thompson & Walker, 1989).

A number of studies also examine the relationship between household division of labor and marital quality. For example, Mederer (1993) administered questionnaires to 359 married women employed full time and found that the more time women spent doing housework relative to their husbands, the more unfair they perceived their relationship to be; additionally, higher perceptions of inequality were positively correlated with marital conflict. Some studies suggest that the relationship between marital satisfaction and division of household labor are moderated by women's employment status. Keith and Schafer (1985) reported that women in dual-earner families reported significantly higher levels of disagreement over and dissatisfaction with family roles than did full-time homemakers. In contrast, Blair and Johnson (1992) reported that although unemployed women spent

more time engaged in household labor, they nonetheless viewed the division of labor in their households as more fair than employed women did. Discrepant results such as these are certainly attributable in part to gender ideologies among women and men, which will be discussed shortly.

Some studies also specifically measure part-time employed women's satisfaction with their household division of labor. For example, Baker, Kiger, & Riley (1996) studied 224 married or cohabitating individuals who had at least one child under the age of 18 and classified them into one of four groups: (a) women who were homemakers, (b) women employed part time, (c) women employed full time, and (d) men employed full time. The authors found that each of the three groups of women reported lower satisfaction with the division of household tasks than did men; however, it is interesting to note that women who worked part time had the lowest levels of satisfaction with the arrangement of household tasks of all the women, while women who worked full time reported the highest household-satisfaction scores. Baker and colleagues suggest that women employed part time may not feel as dependent on their partners for economic support and therefore feel less obligated to complete the majority of household tasks. Furthermore, they propose, women employed part time may experience more role strain and time constraints than homemakers, and be less apt than women employed full time to hire people to assist with household chores. Clearly more research needs to dissect the factors influencing the relationship between employment status and satisfaction with division of household labor.

Women also tend to spend greater amounts of time with their children than do men. Bianchi (2000) reported that although we generally believe fathers today are significantly more involved with child rearing than they were in the past, in 1998 the average amount of time fathers spent caring for their children was only 56% of mothers' time. Zimmerman and Addison (1997) conducted interviews with several working mothers and similarly found that although they and their spouses spent similar amounts of time working outside the home, mothers continued to be the primary caregivers of their children during non-working hours and were usually the parent who left work to pick up children who

were ill. Zimmerman and Addison conclude that “mothers are *responsible* for the planning and management of children and fathers ‘help out’” (p. 26).

In addition, working mothers tend to be more likely to interrupt their careers for mothering responsibilities, and they are more likely than fathers to consider the needs of their family when deciding to enter or leave the work force and when choosing the number of hours and at what times they will work (Sicherman, 1996; Friedman, 1991). Interestingly, mothers—in contrast to fathers—are less likely to considering work as something they “are,” treating it instead as something they “do” (Thompson & Walker, 1989). Due to the unequal distribution of child rearing responsibilities, like household responsibilities, many women find it especially difficult to balance work and family obligations, and often feel dissatisfied with the marital relationship (Casper & Bianchi, 2002).

Much of the inequality of the division of household labor and child rearing responsibilities between women and men can be attributed to gender role ideologies. Traditional gender role ideologies, largely lingering from past images of the “ideal” stay-at-home mother/breadwinner father family, suggest that women, rather than men, should be primarily responsible for child rearing and household work. Many women and men today continue to be influenced by such traditional ideas, causing the inequalities between the sexes to continue to permeate our society. However, in the past few decades gender role ideologies for both women and men have become increasingly less traditional, particularly among women who work full-time (Glass, 1992). Using data from the National Opinion Research Center Spain and Bianchi (1996) reported that in 1993 only 15% of U.S. residents believed women should take care of the home, as compared to 35% in 1973; they also found that in 1994 19% of U.S. residents believed women should not work, which was much lower than the 34% reported in 1972.

Although a majority of people would agree that these changes are positive, some researchers have found that adherence to less-traditional gender-role ideologies by at least one member of a couple is often associated with higher levels of marital conflict and lower levels of marital

satisfaction. For example, a study by Amato and Booth (1995), which utilized an 8-year longitudinal sample of 1,043 married individuals provides some support for this hypothesis. After controlling for age, education, race, number of years married, income, and wife's employment, these authors found that wives whose gender-role attitudes became less traditional over the 8-year study reported a decline in marital quality, whereas husbands whose gender-role attitudes became less traditional throughout the study reported an increase in marital quality. Other researchers have likewise proposed that marital conflict is higher when one member of a marriage partnership adheres to a traditional gender role ideology while their partner does not (Friedman, 1991; Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983).

Additionally, some research has shown higher marital satisfaction and lower marital conflict for homemaker mother/breadwinner father families than for families in which the mother works either part time or full time. For example, Baker et al. (1996) found that, in comparison to women who worked part time and full time, homemakers reported the highest satisfaction with the time arrangements of their marital relationships, including satisfaction with leisure time, time spent with partner, and time spent with friends. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) studied 120 couples and similarly found that for couples who do not fight about whether the wife should be employed full-time, homemaker women and their husbands both reported higher levels of marital quality than did women and spouses of women who worked part time or full time.

Baker et al. (1996) suggest that homemaker mother/breadwinner father families experience higher levels of marital satisfaction because they have a ready-made model of what men and women should do within the family and do not have to struggle to create a new gender role ideology. They state,

Without a common cultural marriage model, couples are compelled to reshape their marital-role responsibilities as they struggle to define ambiguous situations and attempt to come to some sort of satisfactory agreement over daily family concerns and obligations. (p. 163)

Clearly men's and women's gender-role ideologies have a strong influence on their opinions as to whether or not women should work outside the home and how household tasks and child rearing

responsibilities should be divided. Research should continue to examine the interrelationships among gender role ideology, marital satisfaction, and division of household labor and child rearing responsibilities.

Limitations of Past Research

Although much research has provided important and enlightening insights into the variables and factors influencing mothers' feelings and experiences, most quantitative studies rarely involve more than three or four variables, therefore providing an incomplete picture of the phenomenon of motherhood. Additionally, little research has specifically utilized samples of stay-at-home mothers and mothers employed part-time; instead, most research has used samples of women separated only according to a homemaker-employed woman dichotomy and rarely differentiating this dichotomy by motherhood status. Finally, most research has not provided the in-depth information available through qualitative methods. More research of motherhood and mothering needs to utilize qualitative methods with specific samples and sub-samples of mothers (i.e., stay-at-home mothers of young children, mothers of young children who work part-time, etc.) so that a broader picture of mothers' experiences can be presented for researchers, therapists, and society alike.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative Research and Phenomenology

Qualitative research methods are a valuable means of gaining in-depth knowledge about people and their experiences. Such research provides detailed and holistic descriptions of social phenomena on individual and collective levels, and allows for the portrayal of multiple perspectives relating to those phenomena. Qualitative research also allows for an understanding of processes of change over time, an awareness of how individuals interpret those processes, and an appreciation of the inter-subjective experience of “being there” throughout a process or experience (Weiss, 1994). This type of research approach also allows for questions to be answered on several levels, thereby greatly increasing our knowledge of specific phenomena. As Creswell (1998) states, the use of qualitative research “...takes the reader [or researcher] into the multiple dimensions of a problem or issue and displays it in all of its complexity” (p. 15).

A naturalistic, qualitative approach to research also allows informants’ experiences to be portrayed in their own words rather than within the preconceived frameworks, definitions, and biases of a researcher. In qualitative research the researcher attempts to inductively understand a phenomenon by searching for patterns and themes in data gathered through open-ended observations and questions rather than through *a priori* hypotheses and deductive methods (Patton, 1990). Qualitative research can also provide a broad overview of the many variables associated with various social phenomena and provide a framework from which hypotheses may be formed (Weiss, 1994).

Creswell (1994) lists several of the assumptions which characterize qualitative research: (a) research should occur in the natural setting, (b) theories and hypotheses emerge—they are not created *a priori*, (c) human researchers are the main instrument of data collection and analysis, (d) the data are primarily language-based and descriptive rather than numeric, (e) each person has unique experiences and perceptions; hence, reality is subjective rather than objective; there are multiple realities, (f) research is directed at both processes and outcomes, (g) research focuses on individual cases or small

numbers of cases. (h) researcher interpretation is negotiable. (i) intuition and feelings are an important aspect of research, and (j) researchers are subjective rather than objective; therefore the goal of research is trustworthiness and verification rather than truthfulness and objectivity.

Qualitative research, or naturalistic inquiry, is an appropriate framework for this research examining full-time and part-time stay-at-home mothers because it can provide a large amount of information that could not be obtained utilizing other methods. Lofland (1971) summarizes the depth of information that can be gained using qualitative research methods:

The commitment to get close, to be factual, descriptive, and quotive, constitutes a significant commitment to represent the participants in their own terms. This does not mean that one becomes an apologist for them, but rather that one faithfully depicts what goes on in their lives and what life is like for them, in such a way that one's audience is at least partially able to project themselves into the point of view of the people depicted. They can "take the role of the other" because the reporter has given them a living sense of day-to-day talk, day-to-day activities, day-to-day concerns and problems. The audience can know the petty vexations of their existence, the disappointments that befall them, the joys and triumphs they savor, the typical contingencies they face. There is a conveyance of their prides, their shames, their secrets, their fellowships, their boredoms, their happinesses, their despairs. (p. 4)

In short, qualitative research allows the utmost access to another individual's experiences and reality and is therefore a superior means through which mothering and motherhood can be better understood.

Several specific approaches to qualitative research can help a researcher gain in-depth information. One of these is phenomenology. Phenomenology seeks to understand the fundamental essence or core of a particular social phenomenon, such as stay-at-home motherhood, and to describe how that phenomenon is experienced by individuals both separately and collectively (Moustakas, 1994). Patton (1990) explains that phenomenology "focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience" (p. 71). Moustakas (1994) also states,

The aim [of phenomenology] is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions general or universal meanings are derived, in other words the essences or structures of the experience. (p. 13)

According to Creswell (1998), most phenomenological research utilizes one-on-one interview methods of data collection. Weiss (1994) describes the benefits of interviewing:

We can learn also, though interviewing, about people's interior experiences. We can learn what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions. We can learn how events affected their thoughts and feelings. We can learn the meanings to them of their relationships, their families, their work, and their selves. We can learn about all the experiences, from joy through grief, that together constitute the human conditions.... Interviewing rescues events that would otherwise be lost. The celebrations and sorrows of people not in the news, their triumphs and failures, ordinarily leave no record except in their memories.... Most of the significant events of people's lives can become known to others only through interview. (p. 1-2)

For phenomenological research specifically, interviews provide detailed descriptions of several individuals' "lived experiences" relating to the phenomena of interest, such as stay-at-home mothering. Frequently phenomenological researchers will create a semi-structured interview guide which lists the research questions relating to the phenomenon of interest. Creswell explains that the phenomenological researcher "writes research questions that explore the meaning of that experience for individuals and asks individuals to describe their everyday lived experiences" (p. 54). Such an interview guide can lead the researcher throughout a one-on-one interview with an informant; however, the topics do not need to be discussed in a sequence, but may simply be covered throughout the natural evolution of a conversation. Patton (1990) explains,

The general interview guide approach involves outlining a set of issues that are to be explored with each respondent before interviewing beings. The issues in the outline need not be taken in any particular order and the actual wording of questions to elicit responses about those issues is not determined in advance. The interview guide simply serves as a basic checklist during the interview to make sure that all relevant topics are covered. (p. 280)

Such an approach is an excellent means of gaining in-depth information about an individual's experiences relating to a particular phenomenon because it allows an individual to speak freely about their experiences, while simultaneously providing some structure for the interview.

Once the interviews have been completed, a specific phenomenological approach to data analysis can be used to help clarify and describe the phenomenon or phenomena under investigation. Moustakas (1994) outlines the steps of phenomenological data analysis: (1) Epoche and bracketing

the topic or question, (2) horizontalizing, (3) delimiting horizons or meanings, (4) clustering horizons into themes, (5) organizing horizons and themes into coherent individual and composite textural descriptions of the phenomenon. In the first step the researcher engages in the process of Epoche and brackets the topic or research question. Moustakas defines Epoche, saying,

Epoche is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things.... In the Epoche, the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego. (p. 33)

Moustakas further explained,

This way of perceiving life calls for looking, noticing, becoming aware, without imposing our prejudgment on what we see, think, imagine, or feel. It is a way of genuine looking that precedes reflectiveness, the making of judgments, or reaching conclusions. We suspend everything that interferes with fresh vision. We simply let what is there stand as it appears, from many angles, perspectives, and signs. (p. 86)

According to Moustakas, once a researcher has engaged in Epoche, effective bracketing can occur. Bracketing is the analysis and interpretation of a phenomenon independent from the typical meanings given it in society, the media, or literature. Denzin (1989) describes this process:

In bracketing, the researcher holds the phenomenon up for serious inspection. It is taken out of the world where it occurs. It is taken apart and dissected. Its elements and essential structures are uncovered, defined, and analyzed. It is treated as a text or a document; that is, as an instance of the phenomenon that is being studied. It is not interpreted in terms of the standard meanings given to it by the existing literature. Those preconceptions... are suspended and put aside during bracketing. In bracketing, the subject matter is confronted, as much as possible, on its own terms. (p. 55)

The second step in phenomenological data analysis is horizontalizing, a process in which "...every statement initially is treated as having equal value" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). Third, according to Moustakas, statements that are irrelevant to the research question or that are overlapping and repetitive are deleted, leaving only the delimited horizons, or textural meanings of the phenomenon. Fourth, the meaningful horizons are clustered into themes. Creswell (1998) refers to this step as transforming the delimited horizontalized statements into "clusters of meanings" (p. 55).

Finally, the fifth step of phenomenological research includes two aspects, according to Moustakas (1994). First, the themes or meaning clusters are integrated into coherent textural descriptions of the phenomenon for each research informant individually; and second, the themes are integrated into a coherent composite description of the phenomenon for all informants collectively. The result of this type of data analysis should be a report which provides the reader with a better understanding of the essence, or lived experience, of the phenomenon being studied. For this research in particular, use of phenomenological methods should provide the reader with a better understanding of the phenomenon, or lived experience, of stay-at-home mothering.

Researcher as Instrument

As the primary researcher of this qualitative inquiry about the experiences of full-time and part-time stay-at-home mothers, I had an integral role in the data collection process, as well as in the analysis and interpretation of that data. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) state, our personal "...values are determinative of decisions about what to study, how to study it, and what interpretations to make" (p. 162). For this reason, I will explain my background and biases in relation to this research topic. This is an important step in post-positivistic research because it allows the reader to understand how my opinions and views may have influenced the research process. Additionally, addressing my personal values and biases will better help me to engage in the process of Epoche described by Moustakas (1994).

My personal values began on a farm in southwestern Iowa. My parents both worked as farmers, and I generally took care of housework and cooking while my brothers helped with farming. The gender-role ideology I acquired during my first 18 years of life was therefore quite traditional. I attended Grinnell College and received my undergraduate degree in psychology. My years as an undergraduate expanded my understanding of many topics and encouraged me to pursue my education as far as I could. Two years ago I finished my Master's in Human Development and Family Studies at Iowa State University and I am currently a Ph.D. candidate in the same program. My

husband is also a Ph.D. student; he is enrolled in the agronomy department. Although we are both students, having a family is important to us, so we began our family 2 years ago when our first child was born. We are expecting another child in a few months.

Throughout my schooling I have worked with children in many settings, including an internship with an elementary school guidance counselor, a full-time job at a preschool, and a graduate assistantship with a school-aged children's after-school program. My primary areas of interest are parent-child relations and mothering. My Master's thesis examined the relationship between parental empathy and children's self-esteem. A secondary area of interest is family finance, an interest that developed through a teaching assistantship for a family financial management class. When I graduate, I will have been in graduate school for a total of 4 years. Completing my Master's degree and my Ph.D. in such a short amount of time, coupled with having a family, has been the most difficult, stressful experience of my life. I have developed strong organizational skills to help me balance my obligations and priorities; I imagine one day I will look back on my experiences at Iowa State and more clearly see how they strengthened me as a person. My interest in exploring the experiences of full-time and part-time stay-at-home mothering evolved from my own experiences as a mother struggling to balance home and school roles.

When people ask me, "What do you do for a living?" I usually explain that I'm a student, and then I describe how I also spend a large portion of my time caring for my son. I would personally label myself as a part-time stay-at-home mother. My family is my top priority. My personal translation of this fact into the real world means that I try to spend large amounts of time with my son and husband. I firmly believe my role as a mother is the most valuable role I will perform throughout my lifetime; the influence I have on my children, whether positive or negative, will radiate outward through my children to others, shaping modern-day society, as well as future generations.

Our son is not enrolled in paid child care because I feel obligated as a parent to provide as much love and happiness for my son during as many hours of the day as possible. I believe most

parents love their children more than anybody else could, including daycare providers. However, I do “trade children” about 8 hours weekly with another mother who has a daughter the same age as my son, which gives me some time to work on school-related projects and to go to campus. I believe my son benefits socially from the playtime he has with his friend; however, I sometimes wish I did not have to leave him with somebody else. I am happy I only need to arrange child care for 8 hours of the week. I accomplish the remainder of my school work while my son is napping and when my husband is home, particularly during the evenings and on Saturday.

Not only do I currently spend more time with our son than my husband does, but I expect I will continue to do so in the future because I anticipate motherhood will always be one of my highest priorities. Additionally, my husband is more career-oriented than I am, and jobs in his field generally pay significantly more than jobs in my area of expertise. However, I also expect to develop other talents not directly related to mothering by spending time achieving professional and career goals, doing volunteer work, and engaging in hobbies. I feel that spending some time away from my family and developing my other capacities will make me a happier, more relaxed person. Nevertheless, I do not anticipate working full time while my children are young because I do not want to experience the role strain I have heard described by other mothers as well as in the research literature.

The majority of my experiences related to mothering are positive. I particularly enjoy seeing things with a fresh perspective through my son’s innocent eyes as I watch him explore his world. It is exciting to witness the growth of his vocabulary and to see how his mind connects various objects and situations together. I delight in the hugs and kisses, as well as when he refers to me as “Mom-Mom” or “Money.” My biggest challenges related to motherhood are ensuring that I spend daily quality and quantity time with my son, as well as maintaining a calm, patient attitude even when life seems overwhelming. I often feel guilty when I cannot wholeheartedly respond and pay attention to my son because of a school deadline or because I am rushing to get to campus for a meeting. It is likely that

the prevalent social images of “good” mothering which I previously described have influenced by own goals and beliefs regarding parenting.

I feel my husband supports and encourages me as I work to balance motherhood and my educational and professional goals. Overall we have a happy, loyal, fun relationship with each other and we make a great “team” as we both strive to complete our dissertations and raise our son in a way we feel is appropriate. We both contribute to the completion of household tasks, although I often feel I do more. My husband does the laundry and puts away all the toys every night, while I cook, wash the dishes, and do the general cleaning and errands.

I believe most people I am acquainted with respect my decision to place my family, rather than my schooling, as my highest priority; my friends are often amazed that I can balance school with caring for my son. However, at times I have been saddened to realize that many people in society do not consider motherhood as valuable an occupation as a professional career. I try to ignore negative comments and focus on my personal priorities, rather than priorities subscribed by “society.” Balancing my priority of mothering with the importance I place on my education has been one of the greatest struggles I have faced, and I expect this balancing act will continue throughout my lifetime.

I have several expectations about part-time stay-at-home mothers. First, I believe that many mothers who work part time enjoy the opportunity to “use their minds” beyond the ways in which they would use them solely as stay-at-home mothers. Additionally, I suspect that many women feel more respected in society when they can say that they are more than *just* a stay-at-home mom. However, I also believe that many women resent the role strain they experience as they try to simultaneously work and mother. Additionally, I suspect that some mothers who work part time struggle with feeling judged by acquaintances who believe that mothers should only be at home with their children.

I also have some preconceived thoughts about full-time stay-at-home mothers. Based on conversations I have had with friends, I believe that some stay-at-home mothers feel that society does

not respect women who spend their time as full-time mothers because they are supposedly either not using their talents to the fullest or they are oppressed and shackled by a patriarchal society. In contrast, however, I believe many stay-at-home mothers experience a great deal of respect from others who value families and they may not struggle as much with issues of balancing their time between employment and family.

Research Informants

The informants for this research included part-time and full-time stay-at-home mothers who were married, who had obtained college degrees, and who had postponed or cancelled full-time careers in order to be stay-at-home mothers. Part-time stay-at-home mothers were defined as mothers who worked outside the home between 10 and 25 hours weekly, while full-time stay-at-home mothers were defined as mothers who did not work outside the home at all. Seven part-time and seven full-time stay-at-home mothers were interviewed. From the initiation of this research, I planned to interview at least five part-time and five full-time stay-at-home mothers and continue interviewing mothers until I felt no new information was being obtained (saturation). After six interviews with part-time stay-at-home mothers and five with full-time stay-at-home mothers, I felt I could soon conclude the interview process. I completed one additional interview with a part-time stay-at-home mother and two additional interviews with full-time stay-at-home mothers, leaving seven mothers in each group.

All informants were married, middle-class, and had either one or two children under the age of 5; this age was chosen to ensure that the children were not enrolled full time in school and that the informants spent much of their daily time caring for their children. None of the mothers were enrolled in university classes, and all the informants were from central Iowa. The mean ages of the full-time and part-time stay-at-home mothers respectively were 31.85 (range = 27 to 35 years of age) and 29.86 (range = 23 to 36 years of age). The informants reported having been married between 3 and 13 years. The reported religious affiliations of the full-time stay-at-home mothers included Lutheran (1),

Catholic (1), and Latter-day Saint (1); one full-time stay-at-home mother described herself as religious and spiritual but reported no religious affiliation; two described themselves as neither religious or spiritual; and one described herself as spiritual but not religious. The reported religious affiliations for the part-time stay-at-home mothers included Baptist (1), Methodist (2), and Catholic (1); two part-time stay-at-home mothers described themselves as neither religious nor spiritual; and one described herself as spiritual but not religious.

The average annual income level for both the full-time and part-time groups ranged from \$50,000-\$59,000 (the full-time group reported incomes ranging from the \$10,000-\$19,000 level to the \$100,000 or more level; the part-time group reported incomes ranging from the \$10,000-\$19,000 level to the \$90,000-\$99,000 level). For the part-time stay-at-home group, one mother had completed an Associate in Arts degree, and six had completed Bachelor's degrees; the education levels of the spouses of the part-time group included two high school diplomas and five Bachelor's degrees. The part-time stay-at-home mothers' occupations included an apartment manager, a transit bus driver, a cosmetic sales consultant, a loan technician, a social worker, pharmacist, and a medical office clerical worker; the reported occupations of their spouses included a full-time graduate student, an information technologist/part-time undergraduate student, a lab manager, a computer consultant, a mortgage loan officer, a pharmacist, and a cell phone site manager.

For the full-time stay-at-home mother group, five mothers had completed Bachelor's degrees and two had completed Master's degrees; spouses' education levels included three Bachelor's degrees, two Master's degrees, and two Ph.D.s. Occupations prior to becoming mothers or quitting their jobs included Ph.D. student, administrative assistant, human resources analyst, CPA, department store manager, factory worker, and university instructor; the current occupations of the full-time group's spouses included an engineer, an engineer/full-time Ph.D. student, two professors, a corporate consultant, a salesman, and a full-time graduate student.

Data Collection Procedure

Ethics and Recruitment

Approval for this research was obtained from the Human Subjects Review Board at Iowa State University. Each informant was given a letter including (a) a description of the nature of the research, (b) a description of any potential risks and discomfort, (c) a description of how all informants could end participation in the research at any time, and (d) a promise of complete confidentiality (see Appendix A). All raw data were viewed only by the primary researcher, and pseudonyms were used for data analysis purposes.

Informants were located through word of mouth from friends and acquaintances. I contacted each potential informant via telephone and (a) told them my university affiliation, (b) told them I received their name from a mutual friend (if applicable), (c) told them why they were selected, (d) ensured confidentiality, and (e) told them the interviews would be audio-taped. I also filtered potential informants by asking questions to ensure they (a) had either one or two children and who were under the age of 5, (b) were married, (c) described themselves as middle class, (d) had obtained a college degree, (e) were either part-time stay-at-home mothers (employed less than 25 hours per week) or full-time stay-at-home mothers (not employed outside the home). The recruitment script is included in Appendix B. If potential informants met the eligibility requirements for participation, we scheduled an interview date and time, after which I mailed them a letter reminding them of our appointment and explaining the details of the research (see letter in Appendix A).

Data Collection

The interviews. Each mother had the opportunity to share her lived experiences related to mothering through one in-depth interview that lasted approximately 90 minutes. Most interviews were conducted in the mothers' homes; two were conducted in my home. I used a semi-structured open-ended interview approach, complete with an interview guide, to provide direction to my conversation with the informants. My grand-tour questions were "What do you say when others ask

you, ‘What do you do for a living?’ or ‘Are you employed?’” or “What is it like to be a stay-at-home mother/mother who works part time?” and “How do you feel about being a stay-at-home mother/mother who works part time?” Several mini-tour questions followed the grand tour questions, addressing areas such as daily life, the decision to stay at home/work part time, the self, others’ perceptions, and the future. A copy of the Interview Guide is included in Appendix C.

I referred to the interview guide when necessary throughout the interviews; however, for the most part, I memorized the questions and attempted to make the interview feel as natural and comfortable as possible. I occasionally glanced at my interview guide while the informants spoke and checked off the questions they answered while talking. If a question on the interview guide was not discussed by the informant, I would insert it into the conversation at a point that seemed natural. After all areas from the interview guide had been discussed, I encouraged the informants to share any additional information they felt would help me better understand their experiences as stay-at-home mothers. I also recorded relevant field notes throughout the interviews, and following the interview, each informant also completed a demographic questionnaire, as well as questionnaires measuring self-esteem, satisfaction with the parenting role, marital satisfaction, and life satisfaction.

Demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire assessed informant age, education level, number and sex of children, employment history and current employment status and occupation, religious or spiritual orientation, marriage history, family income, spouse’s age, spouse’s education, and spouse’s occupation. See Appendix D for a copy of the demographic questionnaire.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSE) (Rosenberg, 1979) was used to measure the informants’ self-esteem levels (see Appendix E). The RSE is a Guttman scale with 10 items measuring one dimension. Reliability of the RSE is .92. Much research supports the validity of the RSE: it is positively correlated with the Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory and measures of peer-group reputation, and negatively correlated with measures of anxiety and depression (Rosenberg, 1979). For the current research, the scores for the responses of the RSE were inverted so

that higher scores indicated higher self-esteem (for typical use of the RSE, low scores indicate high self-esteem). Negatively worded items (2, 5, 6, 8, and 9) were reverse-coded and the responses were summed to yield a total RSE score ranging from 10 to 40 with 40 being the highest possible score.

Kansas Parental Satisfaction Scale. The Kansas Parental Satisfaction Scale (KPS) (Schumm & Hall, 2000) is a 3-item measure aimed at measuring parents' satisfaction with themselves as parents, with the behavior of their children, and with their relationship with their children (see Appendix F). Reliability coefficients of the KPS range from .78 to .85; construct validity of the KPS has been demonstrated through high correlations with measures of marital satisfaction and self-esteem (Schumm & Hall, 2000). An initial study utilizing the KPS with a 7-point Likert scale for a sample of mothers in three Kansas communities yielded a mean of 17.4 ($SD = 2.2$); a second study of both mothers and fathers in 35 Southern Baptist churches and based on a 5-point Likert scale resulted in means of 7.79 ($SD = 2.05$) for women and 8.12 ($SD = 2.26$) for men. (James, Schumm, Kennedy, Grigsby, Shectman, & Nichols, 1985). For the current research, a 7-point Likert scale was used; responses for the three items were summed and ranged from 3 to 21 with higher scores indicating higher satisfaction with the parenting role.

Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale. The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS) (Schumm, Paff-Bergen, Hatch, Obiorah, Copeland, Meers et al., 2000) is a 3-item measure that assesses general marital satisfaction. Like the KPS, the KMS is scored on a 7-point Likert scale (see Appendix G). Responses are summed and range from 3 to 21 with higher scores indicating greater marital satisfaction. The KMS has high internal consistency, with an alpha coefficient of .93. Construct validity of the KPS has been demonstrated through high correlations with the Quality of Marriage Index and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale and lower correlations with other areas of satisfaction such as weather and politics (Schumm et al., 1986). An initial study utilizing the KMS with a sample of 61 wives from Kansas yielded item means of 6.21 ($SD = .84$), 6.11 ($SD = .84$), and 5.95 ($SD = 1.04$) for

satisfaction with spouse, with marriage, and with relationship with spouse, respectively (Schumm, Paff-Bergen, Hatch, Obiorah, Copeland, Meers et al., 1986).

Satisfaction with Life Scale. Informants also completed the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) which measures global life satisfaction (see Appendix H). The SWLS includes five items measured on a 7-point Likert scale; responses are summed to yield a total life satisfaction score ranging between 5 and 35 with higher scores indicating higher life satisfaction. Diener et al. (1985) report that the mean SWLS score from an early study utilizing a sample of 176 University of Illinois undergraduates was 23.5 ($SD = 6.43$); the mean from another study using an elderly sample (mean age = 75 years) yielded a mean of 25.8. The authors report that the alpha coefficient of the SWLS was .87; construct validity was evidenced by correlations in the predicted direction with measures of self-esteem, happiness, neuroticism, emotionality, and independent ratings of life satisfaction based on interviews.

Data Analysis

The data from the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed according to the five steps of phenomenological methods of data analysis outlined by Moustakas (1994). As listed previously, these steps are (1) Epoche and bracketing, (2) horizonalizing, (3) delimiting horizons, (4) clustering horizons into themes, and (5) integrating themes into individual and collective textural descriptions of the phenomenon.

For the first step—Epoche and bracketing—I attempted to ignore any preconceived ideas about or experiences with stay-at-home mothers and considered the data separate from social norms related to stay-at-home mothering. I kept a detailed audit trail throughout the interviews and data analysis process in order to assist me with this step. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that an audit trail includes

...reflective and introspective notations about the state of one's mind in relation to what is happening in the field (developing constructions, commentary on the perceived influence of one's own biases, expectations about what will happen next, and the like); a record of

hypotheses and questions that will be useful to follow up and/or to discuss with one's fellow inquirers; and a cathartic section in which one can vent one's frustrations and anxieties. (p. 281)

Keeping an audit trail helped me to recognize how my preconceived ideas about stay-at-home mothering may have influenced the interviews and to make necessary adjustments throughout the interview process. It also provided me with the opportunity to regularly reflect on the content of the interviews, helping to ensure that I continued to engage in the processes of *Epoche* and bracketing.

I performed each of Moustakas' (1994) other four steps twice: once for each informant individually, and again for all informants collectively. To analyze the individual informants' experiences of stay-at-home mothering, I read and re-read the transcripts to gain a sense of the overall experiences of each mother. I then horizontalized all statements, or treated all statements equally, by listing the essence of each statement in the margins of the transcript along with a reference code for each statement. I highlighted particularly meaningful statements while crossing out overlapping statements and comments that were irrelevant to stay-at-home mothering. I then clustered the remaining statements into themes and listed all the reference codes on a sheet of paper under the appropriate theme heading. I frequently moved specific statements to different theme categories until I felt satisfied that the information was correctly organized. I referred to each informant's "theme sheet" and transcript to write a detailed description of each individual's experience of stay-at-home mothering, which are included in Chapter 4. These descriptions do not list the themes I found for each informant; instead, I attempted to write a coherent, smooth description in which the themes naturally present themselves. These descriptions were mailed to each informant and they were instructed to add to, delete, and change any portion of the summary so that it would correctly and completely describe their experience as a mother who stays at home full time or a mother who works part time (see Appendix I).

Composite theme analyses of both the full-time and part-time stay-at-home mothers were also performed. The composite analyses for the full-time and part-time groups are presented in Chapters 5

and 6 respectively. For this portion of data analysis, I divided the raw interview transcript for each informant into statements, keeping all overlapping statements and eliminating only a few irrelevant statements. I cut apart all the statements for each informant and grouped them according to whether they belonged to the full-time or part-time stay-at-home mother group. I then read and re-read each individual statement and grouped them according to themes, discarding any irrelevant statements. I discovered seven themes for each group of mothers.

I then met with two other individuals (my major professor and a different stay-at-home mother for the full-time and part-time groups' analyses) and they read all the statements I believed belonged within specific themes. If they read a statement which they felt did not fit within a certain theme, the three of us discussed appropriate placement of that statement until consensus was reached. Additionally, my colleagues and I discussed and agreed how the statements within each theme could be grouped into sub-themes. This process was conducted on two separate occasions, once for the full-time group and once for the part-time group. I then wrote a detailed, narrative description of each theme and sub-theme for both groups using a majority of the statements provided by the informants to meaningfully represent the lived experience of full-time and part-time stay-at-home mothering.

The quantitative data from the questionnaires were used only descriptively and are presented in tabular format in Chapter 4. The mean scores of the RSE, KPS, KMS, and SWLS for each group of mothers is also presented in that chapter.

Using the multiple data collection and analysis methods I have described, including multiple sources of data (interviews and questionnaires), peer reviews, and an audit trail, the credibility and trustworthiness of the results of this research were well-established. Thick description of the data, along with illustrative quotations, which are provided in the narrative descriptions in Chapters 4 through 6, allow readers of this report to make their own decisions regarding the transferability of the data and conclusions.

CHAPTER 4. INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES OF STAY-AT-HOME MOTHERING

In this chapter I provide detailed information about each individual mother I interviewed; this information is presented separately for full-time and part-time stay-at-home mothers respectively.

Demographic profiles, as well as the informants' self-esteem and parenting, marital, and life satisfaction scores, are presented in tabular form for each group of seven mothers, followed by detailed descriptions of each mother's experience as a mother. Numerous quotes allow the reader to gain an in-depth understanding of these mother's personalities, values, and personal experiences.

Individual Profiles of the Full-Time Stay-At-Home Mothers

Each full-time stay-at-home mother provided me with information regarding their age, education, household income, religious or spiritual affiliations, employment history, and marital history. Additionally, I obtained information about these mothers' spouses and their children (Appendix D shows a copy of the demographic questionnaire I used to obtain this information). This information is presented in Table 1. All names have been changed to ensure confidentiality. Additionally, each mother's scores for the RSE, KPS, KMS, and SWLS, which measure self-esteem, parenting satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and life satisfaction respectively, are presented. The mean scores on these measures for the full-time stay-at-home mothers are also listed as follows: RSE: $\bar{M} = 36.29$; KPS: $\bar{M} = 17.71$; KMS: $\bar{M} = 18.28$; SWLS: $\bar{M} = 29.14$. Although the scoring of the RSE for this study is unique and has no direct comparison, it is nonetheless fairly high. The mean KPS for the full-time group is similar to the mean score ($\bar{M} = 17.4$) of a group of mothers in Kansas (James et al., 1985) and to the mean KMS score ($\bar{M} = 18.27$) of a group of wives in the same state (Schumm et al., 1986). Interestingly, the mean SWLS score for the full-time stay-at-home mothers was much higher than the means reported from two other studies utilizing undergraduates ($\bar{M} = 23.5$) and an elderly sample ($\bar{M} = 25.8$) (Diener et al., 1985).

Table 1. Full-time stay-at-home mothers' individual profiles

	Sally	Adrianna	Amber	Deborah
Age	35	35	30	33
Education	MA+	BS/BA	BS/BA	BS/BA
Annual Family Income	\$40,000-\$49,999	\$50,000-\$59,999	\$80,000-\$89,999	\$80,000-\$89,999
Reported Spiritual/ Religious Orientation	Not spiritual, not religious	Spiritual and religious; no reported affiliation	Spiritual and religious; Lutheran	Not spiritual, not religious
Employment History	Ph.D. student, full- time; dropped out of program prior to birth of 1 st child	Administrative asst. in various fields, full- time; quit working when 1 st child was 9 months old	Human resources analyst, full-time; reduced to part-time after birth of 1 st child; quit working after birth of 2 nd child	CPA, full-time; quit working when pregnant with 2 nd child
Years Married	8	7	7	8
Spouse Name, Age, Education, Occupation	Steve, age 35; BS/BA+; engineer	Boyd, age 37; Ph.D.; professor	Mark, age 30; BS/BA+; salesman	Jack, age 33; Ph.D.; professor
Children's Names/Ages	Elizabeth, age 4 Wendy, age 1 ½	Samantha, age 2	Nathan, age 2 ½ Zachary, 4 months	James, age 4 Julia, age 1 ½
RSE Score	39	36	36	37
KPS Score	19	19	18	18
KMS Score	19	19	15	20
SWLS Score	30	32	30	33

Note. RSE = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (scores range from 10-40, higher score = higher Self-Esteem);
 KPS = Kansas Parental Satisfaction Scale (scores range from 3-21, higher score = higher parental satisfaction);
 KMS = Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (scores range from 3-21, higher score = higher marital satisfaction);
 SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale (scores range from 5-35, higher score = higher satisfaction with life).

Table 1. (continued)

	Cassie	Kalleen	Anne
Age	33	27	30
Education	BS/BA	BS/BA	MA
Annual Family Income	\$100,000+	\$30,000-\$39,999	\$10,000-\$19,999
Reported Spiritual/ Religious Orientation	Spiritual, but not religious	Spiritual and religious; Catholic	Spiritual and religious; Latter-day Saint
Employment History	Dept. manager for large store, full-time; office asst., full-time; full-time student, completed BA prior to birth of 1 st child	Plasma collection supervisor, full-time; factory worker, full- time; quit working after birth of 2 nd child	University instructor, part-time; quit working prior to birth of 2 nd child
Years Married	13	3 ½	6
Spouse Name, Age, Education, Occupation	Brian, age 35; MA; corporate consultant	Josh, age 32; MA+; engineer; Ph.D. student	Dillon, age 29; BS/BA+; full-time graduate student
Children's Names/Ages	Brock, age 1 ½	Benjamin, age 2 Jacob, age 1	Malinna, age 4 Blake, age 2
RSE Score	35	35	36
KPS Score	17	17	16
KMS Score	16	18	21
SWLS Score	27	26	26

Interestingly, there appears to be little variation in most of these mothers' individual scores for the measures of self-esteem, and satisfaction with parenting, marriage, and life in general. Amber and Cassie report slightly lower marital satisfaction scores than the other mothers; however, for the most part, these mothers seem to feel good about themselves and feel satisfied with their parenting role, their marriages, and their lives in general. I realize there may have been a social desirability effect influencing their responses; for this reason, comparing each mother's scores with the individual descriptive narratives listed as follows may provide a more valid indication of her feelings regarding self-esteem parenting, marriage, and life satisfaction.

Full-Time Stay-at-Home Mothers' Experiences of Motherhood and Mothering

Sally

"I love it!" was Sally's reply when asked how she feels about being a stay-at-home mother for two girls, Elizabeth, age 4, and Wendy, age 1 ½. Sally is also expecting another baby soon. This energetic mom had almost nothing negative to say about her role as a full-time mother; instead, she said she considers mothering the most fun thing she has ever done in comparison to past work or school responsibilities. Sally chose her role as a stay-at-home mother because she believes it is the best situation for her children. Not only is she able to give them the love and attention she feels they need and deserve, but she ensures they are raised according to her ideals and values. She clarified, "I just want them raised *my* way—the *right* way!"

Sally's ideals include anonymously engaging in "Random Acts of Kindness," which she hopes her children will learn and embrace by watching her. She also expressed a wish to protect her children from being influenced by the media. Sally believes many parents who work feel frantic and hectic and often miss out on many of the fun, spontaneous activities that she is able to do with her children. She said parents who work "can't say all the sudden, 'The snow's perfect, let's go!!'"

Prior to being a stay-at-home mother, Sally was working on completing a Ph.D. degree but dropped out of her program prior to taking her preliminary examinations due to departmental politics

that were becoming increasingly frustrating. At that time, her husband, Steve, accepted a position at Iowa State University, after which they found out they were expecting a baby. Sally decided that rather than look for a job, it would be more logical to stay at home. Also, she wanted to breastfeed her baby and she concluded that “Steve just didn’t have the proper ‘plumbing.’”

Sally said she places her daughters first on her list of priorities and spends her days nurturing, laughing, and playing with them. She said, “Being with them affirms how important they are to me and that is something they will always have.” Sally and her daughters particularly enjoy being outdoors. Sally said, “I love going to the park. We have so much fun there!” They also spend time at the zoo, walking the dog, and gardening; in the winter, they enjoy sledding.

Sally said she feels that several aspects of stay-at-home mothering are rewarding and beneficial. She described how Elizabeth is “always running up and giving you hugs or she’s saying, ‘I love you, Mommy!’” Sally enjoys watching Elizabeth solve problems and make good choices. She said, “I get the warm fuzzies seeing her making good choices and feel that will help her all throughout her life. That’s a good feeling!” Sally also finds great enjoyment from the humorous things her children say and do. She explained,

There’s always those little moments where they imitate you and they always come up with something. And it just makes you laugh and it’s the funniest thing. Then you have to email it to everybody really quick before you forget it.

For example, Sally laughed as she explained that Elizabeth is proud to tell her friends at preschool that she spends the afternoons at “Mommy Daycare.”

Sally said she also enjoys the opportunity she has to “slow down” and have “lazy days” with her children where there is no particular schedule except the timeline Elizabeth and Wendy personally create as they explore and play. Additionally, Sally said she appreciates the opportunity to enjoy and marvel at small things, like when potato bugs roll up into balls when you touch them. She enjoys teaching her children about nature; they feed rabbits in their backyard and her girls even have their own garden, although no plants have been able to grow there yet due to little trampling feet.

Although Sally describes her role as a stay-at-home mother as almost all positive, there are some negatives associated with mothering full time. For example, there are moments when Sally said she needs a break from her children. She explained, "Of course there are those days when you just don't want to stay home and you say, 'Steve! It's your turn! They're your kids. You take them!'" Sally does not always get the free time she would like in order to organize things around the house. However, she tries to utilize the few "free" minutes she gets here and there when her girls are playing quietly.

Sally said she believes that she and Steve must make financial sacrifices in order to live on one income; they give up luxuries others might consider necessities, such as a big house or paying somebody to do the housework and other home remodeling and repair projects. Sally and Steve not only make fewer purchases now than they did before they had children, but Sally feels they find greater satisfaction from less-expensive purchases. Sally said, "It's funny. For your birthday you're excited about new socks or something! 'Oohhh! New socks!'" Other challenges Sally described facing as a stay-at-home mother include extensive home remodeling projects that her husband has taken a long time to complete, rainy days that cause Sally and her girls to feel "stir-crazy," and trying to help Elizabeth and Wendy when they are screaming, teething, or not sleeping.

Sally described her marriage as "really good." She said she feels that Steve is supportive of her role as a stay-at-home mother; at one point he even spared telling her about his problems at work so she would not have something else to worry about. Sally also said she believes Steve appreciates what she does as a stay-at-home mother, and he, like her, puts their children first on his list of priorities. She said that at times Steve would like to be the one to stay home with the children.

Sally and Steve do not have a clear household division of labor. Sally said she tries to do what she can during the day and then she asks for his help when she needs it. Although Sally believes Steve is very willing to help with household tasks, Sally said she feels he does not instinctively see or know what needs to be done. Sally said, "He still has the mentality of a guy who's like, 'What?

What? You can step over that!” Steve is also ultra-concerned about Sally’s physical well-being during her current pregnancy. If Sally tries to do tasks that would be considered dangerous, given her current pregnant state, such as tearing down stone walls in the back yard or using chemicals in the bathroom, her husband gets upset and then finishes the task for her. Sally said she has realized her pregnancy is a great way to motivate her husband to do more things around the house and yard.

During a typical week, Sally has many opportunities to interact with other adults. Not only does she volunteer, but Sally also interacts with many other mothers with kids the same ages as her children. Having a support group is very helpful, Sally believes, because it facilitates the exchange of child rearing information. She said that when parents or their children are experiencing problems,

You can always find somebody that either has personal experience with that sort of situation or knew somebody and you just kind of swap stories about what they tried, if it’s something that needs to be fixed, and see if that works.

Prior to finding a support network of friends and neighbors, Sally described feeling somewhat isolated. She said,

Well, the first year actually was the hardest. That transition going from working to all the sudden staying at home and you don’t really know other people that have kids this age and you’re trying to figure out what to do, especially when your kid’s yelling.

Sally said she experiences a variety of reactions from acquaintances who know she is a stay-at-home mother. While some think she is unable or uninterested in having a career, others are jealous because they wish they could stay home, too. Sally said sometimes she feels that people who do not have children do not care to hear about or do not understand life with a child. She said,

Sometimes you’re just all excited because it’s “Oh, she had a big old poop and it went up the back of her shirt” or whatever, but, well, they don’t want to hear about that kind of thing. But you call grandma and grandmas always want to hear about those big poops!

Sally said she has no specific goals for the future. She said, “I don’t know what the future will be like.... Just wait and see.” However, Sally hopes that her children will “grow up and be happy and do whatever they want to do.”

Adrianna

Adrianna recently decided to stay home full time with her daughter Samantha, age 2. Prior to Samantha's birth, as well as for the first 9 months of Samantha's life, Adrianna worked at a publishing company in Des Moines. She said she enjoyed her job but felt she had no time at home with her daughter, largely due to the long commute. Adrianna said, "I was always working and then we'd come home at night and we were both exhausted.... I never got to live in my home it felt like. I was always leaving it and dropping her off." Adrianna said she also felt like she was missing out on parts of Samantha's life and growth. She explained, "I was, I admit, a little bit jealous that [her daycare providers] got to know her in a way that I didn't." In addition, Adrianna described feeling too busy to keep her home clean, she felt torn when she needed to leave work to get Samantha from daycare when she was ill, and her stress level was excessive.

Adrianna's decision to stay at home did not occur suddenly. She explained, "It was something that I had in my mind from the moment she was born and I just had to see how work would fit into our lives and unfortunately it didn't, as much as I loved it." She continued,

You cannot give 100% to everything. It's impossible to do that. So you have to prioritize.... I think that's why I left my job.... I wasn't the kind of person who wanted to be at work and do things halfway and then be at home and not have enough to give my child.

Adrianna also felt she would be able to work again someday. She said,

I didn't feel like it would be a life sentence. I didn't think I'd have to stay at home forever. I think I'm a valuable enough person that I could go back to work. I don't think the only thing I have to offer is being a mother.

Adrianna and her husband were also at the point financially where they could afford to live on one income. Adrianna chose to stay at home while her husband continued working because his paycheck was larger and because he has a profession he really enjoys. She said, "He has the career. He has the big career that he's always dreamed of. For me, my jobs were just that—jobs. They never really were something that I was driven to do."

Overall, Adrianna thoroughly enjoys being a stay-at-home mother. She said, “It’s—one word—well, it’s wonderful.” Adrianna said she no longer feels the stress of worrying about her work and the associated office politics; instead she enjoys the increased time she has with her daughter. She explained, “I know my daughter a lot better than I would have if I hadn’t decided to stop working at my full-time job.” She continued.

I think I’ve become more focused on enjoying what we have now, than worrying about all the things we have to get done on the next weekend. That’s a little bit also why I decided to stay home because I didn’t think I was enjoying what I had. I loved my daughter, but I wasn’t with her. So I was always thinking about what could be and what might be. And now I just enjoy what is.

Adrianna believes Samantha is more secure, independent, and confident, as well as less physically aggressive because she doesn’t need to compete for adult attention like she would if she were in daycare.

Adrianna described enjoying the opportunity to oversee and observe what Samantha learns each day, and she said she personally learns much from Samantha, as well. For example, Adrianna described playing with arts and crafts with Samantha:

I can’t remember the last time I played with glue and glitter.... I did that the other day and it was a lot of fun just seeing how she figures out all this stuff. She teaches me to be creative, which is something I didn’t think I was capable of after being in the work force for so long.

Adrianna said she enjoys taking Samantha to Storytime at the library or to “Giggles and Wiggles,” a toddler activity playgroup. She also has fun watching Samantha interacting with her friends and experiencing Samantha’s 2-year-old sense of humor. In short, Adrianna said she feels happy with how she has prioritized and simplified her life. She said, “To just enjoy being with each other is a luxury. I think it’s a wonderful luxury.” She concluded, “It was definitely the right decision for me.”

In addition to the positives associated with her role as a stay-at-home mother, Adrianna also experiences some challenges. She said the most negative aspect of her role is housework. She explained,

It is drudgework. Let's face it. It's not glamorous!... I just kind of get tired of the routine sometimes. You pick up, clean up. It's just little moments of, "Oh, I have to do this again." on a daily basis. I don't really have big moments of, "I'm so bored. I don't have anything to do," because that's definitely not the case. It's more like tediousness, of doing the same thing, like cleaning up the bibs and putting away the cups and that sort of thing.

Other challenges include dealing with issues of discipline with Samantha, having less help from her husband with housework, and having less free time than she expected. She said she also misses her extended family more now because she has more time to think about them. Adrianna said at times she worries about her employment marketability if she ever needs or decides to re-enter the workplace. She questioned, "What if I have to go back to work? What if I have to show an employer what I did during this time that I was not in the work force?" She plans to cross that bridge when she comes to it.

Adrianna described occasionally feeling disconnected from the world. She said,

I kind of noticed that sometimes in discussions people don't think that [stay-at-home mothers] have a lot to contribute as far as issues or working and things like that. And sometimes I'm so focused on my family life that I really don't either have time to see what's going on in the news or whatever or in the world.... I still feel comfortable talking to the people I did before. It's just that I don't have that extra issue—work—to discuss. I have motherhood, which can get kind of boring sometimes, let's face it, to be the only thing you talk about.

Nevertheless, Adrianna feels most people have a positive view of stay-at-home mothers.

In order to deal with the loss of adult interaction that occurred when she left work, Adrianna has made an effort to meet other mothers. She said,

I think you can get pretty isolated if you don't make an effort to go out and meet people. They're not going to come to you and if you've been working most of your life and that's where most of your contacts are from, it can be hard to make new contacts once you stay at home.... I've had to go out of my way to meet other mothers and other parents. And that's been rewarding because my daughter has friends and we have a nice little circle getting started now.

Adrianna said she enjoys interacting with her daughter's friends' mothers, as well as learning new parenting techniques from them.

Adrianna seems to have a clear understanding of her priorities and how to balance them. She said, "I would say being a mother is first. That's my job. I guess I put my job first, which is being a

mother and a wife first.” She also places her own needs at the top of her priority list. She said, “I don’t run myself into the ground. I put my daughter’s needs first and mine are right up there with her.” Adrianna said she takes time to relax and regularly works out at the gym in order to “keep her sanity.” She also considers keeping a clean home to be important; however, she said, “We’re pretty much low-maintenance, do-the-minimum, and then let-the-rest-slide-so-we-can-have-fun-with-our-child kind of parents.” Adrianna’s said her faith is another priority, while wealth is less important. She said, “We don’t make a lot of money, but we still have a very decent house and we can provide what she needs. You don’t need a lot of money to stay at home.”

Adrianna said she considers herself a good mother. Although Adrianna feels there is no perfect mother because every child is different, “good” mothering, according to Adrianna, includes teaching her daughter to love and be loved, to respect others and to respect herself, and to “be happy and be satisfied with who she is and realize that she is an incredible person and capable of a lot of wonderful things.” Adrianna described trying to be an example for Samantha in various ways, such as showing her how to make new friends and teaching her to be a happy person. Adrianna said she also teaches Samantha that she has personal needs and talents outside of motherhood. Adrianna explained, “I think it’s a good example for children also to see that their moms are people and aren’t there to be at their beck and call, that they have other talents and things to contribute.”

Adrianna said she feels that she and her husband have a good marriage filled with trust, honesty, and openness. She said they do not argue about finances, and she feels they have great extended families. Adrianna thinks Samantha has only enhanced their marital relationship. However, she said she misses the fun times she and her husband had when it was just the two of them and hopes they can regain some of the intimacy they experienced prior to Samantha’s birth. Adrianna believes her husband’s career is his job, while indoor housework and mothering are her job. He also does outdoor maintenance, feeds Samantha breakfast, and they take turns putting her to bed at night.

However, she said she would like her husband to help more with the housework without her having to ask. She said,

Let's face it. It will always be unbalanced when you decide to stay at home. You'll always feel like you're doing the lion's share of the housework.... I can't do everything and I know he can't do everything, also. So it's a tradeoff. I know he's working hard at his job and that's not something I have to worry about anymore. Not everything is perfect and there are always things we have to work on. It's just one of them.

In the future, Adrianna hopes to continue to have a strong relationship with her daughter and to see her daughter succeed in other relationships and in a career she enjoys. Adrianna said she may work again one day if they need the extra income or if she just has the desire. She also hopes to eventually have more time for gardening, home improvement projects, traveling, and charity work.

Amber

"I always wanted to be able to stay home," replied Amber when asked her reason for being a stay-at-home mother. Amber is the mother of two boys, Nathan and Zachary, who are ages 2 ½ years and 4 months respectively. This very busy woman worked full time as a human resources analyst prior to Nathan's birth, after which she worked part time. Following Zachary's birth, Amber said she felt torn between working and mothering. She said,

I sometimes thought it would be easier if I just worked full time or didn't work at all because trying to do half-and-half sometimes got in the way.... I was doing half of my job at work and then half of my job as a mom, and I didn't ever feel like I was getting to do both very well.

As a result of feeling torn, Amber said she and her husband Mark decided she would stay at home full time rather than work part time. Amber and Mark also wanted to be able to instill their values in their children. She said,

We kind of have the philosophy that if our kids are going to be screwed up we want to be the ones responsible for doing it. We want to be the ones to teach them things and instill their values and all that kind of stuff and not have them be away from us for 10 hours a day.

Amber said she also opted to be a stay-at-home mother because Mark began earning a larger income with a new job, because she did not want to have the stress of getting two children ready for daycare

in the mornings, and because she expected it would be difficult to manage the housework associated with two children while also working. Amber, rather than Mark, chose to stay home because she feels that Mark is less patient than she is and would “go nuts” being home with the children all day.

Amber described her life as being more hectic and busy since Zachary’s birth. She believes she and Mark have little time to spend with each other because they are both focused on different things. She said,

He’s got a new job and he’s really busy and he’s kind of focusing on that and I’m trying to adjust to staying at home and being with the kids and getting out and organized.... We’ve been focusing on opposite things and not each other.... When we are here, he’s usually like outside or in the basement and I’m upstairs folding laundry or with the boys or something. And so even when we’re in the same house it’s like we’re really not in the same house until about 10:30 at night and then it’s like, “Oh, I’m tired. Goodnight. See ya.”

Amber says her marriage is not what she expected because they have little freedom as a couple and little time alone together. However, Amber believes her marriage will grow stronger over the years because they are consciously working to use strategies that will ensure they do not grow apart.

Amber and Mark have a fairly clear division of household labor within their family. Mark works outside the home with his job and he also takes care of outdoor maintenance like the lawn, while Amber said her “40-hour per week job” is housework and mothering. Although she thinks Mark does less around the house than he did when she also worked outside the home, she said he still “pitches in” when something needs to be done. Amber explained that since staying at home full time, she has become more dependent on her husband for entertainment and frequently calls him at work. She said she enjoys the rare times she and her husband can talk alone, such as on their anniversary.

Overall, Amber said she is glad to be a stay-at-home mother. She said, “I really enjoy being there when my kids do fun things. You know, and all the firsts like rolling over and first words and all that kind of stuff. I’m excited about that.” Amber also said she enjoys the hugs and kisses from her children, playing outside, and hearing all the funny things Nathan says. She explained, “Two and a half years old is, I think, a fun age. A lot of people say ‘the terrible twos’ and he has his moments,

believe me, but he just cracks me up. It's just pretty funny." Amber is thankful for the unconditional love she receives from her children. She explained,

Their love is unconditional and they don't care what I do, even if they get in trouble and if I get mad at them, 5 minutes later they've forgotten about it and everything's OK. whereas an adult would carry a grudge for a while longer. They don't care. They're forgiving.

Amber said she appreciates feeling more relaxed and less rushed, having the flexibility to visit her and Mark's families, and the opportunity to provide her children with more individual attention than they would get in daycare. She believes her decision was "definitely worth it."

Amber also faces some challenges with her role. She described stay-at-home mothering as "a very under-rated job." She explained,

I knew it was going to be hard, but I didn't know how hard it was going to be. And yes, it's a lot of fun and yes, I get to do a lot of neat things that I wouldn't get to do if I was working, but there's a stress of just being with them.

Amber said she sometimes finds it difficult to be in the house and with her children almost constantly and she often feels exhausted. She said, "It's harder than I ever imagined it would be. It's a lot of hard work. I'm exhausted at the end of the day." Amber described finding it challenging to keep up with the housework while caring for her children. She said that since Zachary's birth she has often felt more disorganized and for a time even struggled to have a shower by noon. She said other challenges include answering Nathan's "Why?" questions patiently and worrying her children will both scream and disturb others when she takes them places in public.

In order to balance the demands on her time, Amber said she is trying to build a stronger routine with her children and to become more organized. She said she often waits to do things, like grocery shopping, until late at night when her children are in bed and her husband can watch them. Amber feels she has had little free time since Zachary was born. When she has brief periods of time alone, she enjoys seeing movies or going shopping, as well as reading magazines. Amber has recently become involved in a women's circle at her church, an activity which she describes as being more for

herself than anything else. Amber's priorities, in order, include family, faith, herself, and her career, which she believes at this point in time is her family.

Socially Amber said she enjoys spending time with other moms who either stay at home full time or work part time. They often go on "play dates" with their children to the zoo or other places. Amber feels closer to many of her friends than she used to. She said, "We've probably become closer because we exchange similar types of stories and kind of support each other with stress and problems and that kind of thing." Amber enjoys learning new parenting ideas from her friends, as well as from watching other mothers in the grocery store and through reading magazines. Amber said she rarely sees her friends from her former job now that she stays at home.

Amber believes "good" mothers are fun, patient, and "strict but not stern." She said she wants to teach her children appropriate cognitive and social skills, and she also hopes Nathan and Zachary will adopt her and Mark's values. Two important role models for Amber include her own mother and a friend she has known since they were both 6 years old. Amber said she sometimes evaluates her own parenting. She described a "bad parenting day" as a day when she loses her temper or disciplines her children differently than she and Mark had agreed. She said, "There are definitely days that I wish I could do over again because I feel like I haven't been the best parent that I could be."

Amber seems to have a positive image of herself and her mothering role; she described herself as laid back, low-maintenance, outgoing, friendly, kind, and helpful. However, she often feels that others do not respect stay-at-home mothers. She said,

A couple of people have said something like, "Oh you just stay home." I'm like, well, "It's not *just*. Yes I do, but there's more to it." I think they have a feeling that, they maybe don't know that I have a college degree or that I have been in the work force and have done other things and that I did have a career and that kind of thing. They think, "She just stays at home with her kids and watches soap operas."

Amber said she sometimes feels that she allows others' opinions to influence her self-esteem. She said,

I kind of, I let other people, I guess, determine [my self-esteem] for me. Sometimes I feel like I have to justify what I do every day to make it sound like, you know, it's worthwhile. And sometimes it's just like, "I don't care. It's what I do. I love it. I don't care what you think."

In the future, Amber said she hopes to go back to work again, perhaps when her children are in school. However, she also wants to continue to be involved in her children's lives; she expects that children need a lot of support throughout the adolescent years especially. She said, "I'd like to go back and be a corporate woman or whatever and do that again. I think. I don't know. I'll just kind of play it by ear and see where it leads."

Deborah

When people ask Deborah, "What do you do for a living?" she said she typically replies, "I'm fortunate enough to be able to stay at home and take care of my kids and raise them." Deborah's children, James and Julia, are 4 and 1 ½ respectively. Previous to staying at home full time, Deborah worked as a CPA and was the primary breadwinner for their family while her husband Jack completed his Ph.D. Deborah enjoyed her job as a CPA, but often found it stressful to work a lot of overtime and to feel like she was "trying to climb up a ladder." Following the birth of their first child, James, Jack asked Deborah, "Which one of us is going to stay at home?" Jack's mother had been a stay-at-home mom, so he felt it would be a nice situation for their children, as well. However, Deborah said she thought she needed to continue working until Jack finished school, so they decided to place James in daycare.

Shortly after the birth of their second child, Julia, and after moving to Ames where Jack began a new faculty position at Iowa State, Deborah thought she would try staying home for a few months until she looked for a job. Deborah said that, to her surprise, she enjoyed staying at home so much that she chose not to return to work. She said,

I was surprised at how much I enjoy staying at home. For me it was a big unknown. I thought for sure after 2 or 3 months of staying at home I'd be like, "OK, get my resume together and go back out".... And 2 years later I find I'm still enjoying it. I think it's valuable. I think the kids are doing well.

Deborah's satisfaction with her role as a stay-at-home mother is interesting, given that she grew up believing she would always work outside the home. She said,

My parents are divorced, so I grew up not focusing on the fact that I wanted to have kids and things. I was always so worried about having a divorced family situation that I was more focused on my career.

Deborah said she planned to avoid marriage unless she met someone she "could stay married to forever." and if she did marry she assumed she and her husband would both work full time. She could never understand why anybody would want to stay at home full time. However, Deborah now says, "Fortunately I met the right person to marry and we've got a family and I'm able to stay at home."

Deborah believes that having children really changed her and her husband's priorities. She said, "Right now the priority is the family.... My husband and I try to base most of our decisions on what's good for the family." After having children, Jack decided to find a job that would allow him to spend time with his family, and Deborah felt a desire to be with her children rather than to work. She said, "You don't want to necessarily have somebody else raising your kid." Deborah said she feels that money is now the least important element of their lives, while everything else falls between family and money.

Deborah said she has a much lower stress level now that she no longer is employed. She explained,

The job that I had was very stressful. I mean, I was always waking up in the middle of the night and my thoughts were racing and thinking about this tax deadline or that thing I had to do.... Staying home is a lot less stressful, because you wake up in the middle of the night and you're thinking about lullabies and "Bob the Builder's" theme song.

Deborah said she appreciates that everyday at home is a new day, whereas "at work things carry over for months or years or weeks...."

Deborah believes her children also benefit from her role as a stay-at-home mother because they do not need to rush to get ready for daycare each morning. She explained,

I think the kids are happier because you don't have to get up, get them out the door, get them to daycare.... On a lot of levels it's more relaxed. You can spend more time. You're more

flexible about things.... And I think when you're both working it's really hard for them not to think your job's more important.

Although Deborah believes that daycare can be a good situation for many children and recognizes that all parents have to make their own choice about child care, she said she feels the love and support she provides her children could not be matched by a daycare provider.

Staying at home has enabled Deborah to focus more time on her home and family. She said,

I think I'm more focused on our home life. You can spend more time on the house, more time on meals. I'm a much better cook now than I used to be because I have time to plan meals and try things out....

Deborah said she feels that one of the most rewarding aspects of her role is "just knowing that I'm taking care of the house and family and putting dinner on the table." She added,

It's just so "June Cleaver," but it's kind of rewarding just accomplishing the mundane tasks—fixing dinner and watching your children grow up. Julia points to something and says, "E!" or "Backwards!" Her speech is getting better. Just seeing stuff like that everyday is kind of fun.

Although Deborah said that being a stay-at-home mother is primarily a positive experience, she also experiences some challenges. For instance, Deborah said she dislikes reporting zero income when filling out tax returns, and she wishes they could save more for college and retirement. She also feels that mothering is a non-stop job that often has little variety. She said,

It's a full day every day, all day long, which is different than when you're at work.... I find that the biggest thing that I need is to do something different once in a while, which is hard to schedule sometimes.

In addition, Deborah finds that consistently disciplining her children can be difficult.

Deborah said she enjoys interacting with a large network of friends who are also stay-at-home mothers because they provide her with information she feels she lacks because she did not grow up with younger siblings. She said,

That's why talking to other moms, to me, is important and helpful. If I was just on my own in this house and raising two kids I would be going nuts, but it helps when you run into somebody and they're like, "Oh, my son doesn't eat anything either."

Deborah described feeling isolated when she initially began staying at home; however, she now enjoys ample adult contact. She said,

I always was afraid that if I stayed at home, you know, you always hear the stuff in the media about, "Oh, I never get to talk to another adult," but I haven't found that here in Ames. There's a lot of people in the community doing the same thing I'm doing and they're all out and about going to the park and Play Pals at the community center.

Deborah participates in two mother-children play groups, as well as a book club and a women's club.

On the whole Deborah said she feels she is a good mother. She thinks a good mom is "patient, caring, understanding, [has] a sense of humor, sense of fun." Deborah strives to nurture her children every day. She said, "I just try and start fresh every day. I just try to make sure all their needs are met and instill in them that they can't have every toy in the world and being nice to people and respectful." Deborah would like to emulate some mothers in her neighborhood who strictly limit the amount of time their children watch TV, and she admires a friend who has four children under age the age of 5 who "makes it look so easy." She continued, "We go over to their house; it's not hectic.... She's my role model. If she can do it with four I should be able to do it with two!"

Deborah believes Jack respects her mothering role. She said, "I think that my husband really appreciates that I stay at home with them and he values it and thinks it's important." Deborah, rather than Jack, is the stay-at-home parent because Jack makes more money and Deborah feels he is less patient with the children. James and Julia generally prefer their mom to their dad because she is with them more. Deborah said, "It definitely goes without saying that I'm the primary parent. They come to me before anybody else when anything happens."

Prior to having children Jack and Deborah split household tasks evenly and Jack did most of the cooking. Now that Deborah stays at home, she does all the cooking and most of the laundry and cleaning, and she and Jack split the yard work. Jack does most of the household repair work and spends time playing with the children in the evenings. Deborah said she feels Jack is flexible about housework, and he frequently helps out around the house on the weekends. Deborah believes she and

Jack have a “pretty good” marriage and that they’re “pretty close.” She said they have learned to adjust to the ebb and flow of intimacy and communication with each other, which was especially important after the birth of their children. Deborah said she is glad her husband does not believe in divorce. She said, “Every time we have another anniversary I’m like, ‘Oh, we made it another year! Yeah!’” Deborah looks forward to celebrating her 50th wedding anniversary some day.

Deborah said at times it would be nice to work outside the home again; however, she never takes the idea seriously. She said,

There’s times when I see a job posting and think, “Oh, I’m perfect for that! I could walk to campus and work for the alumni association. Jack and I could walk in together!” And he’s like, “But who would take the kids to daycare?” And I’m like, “Daycare. Oh yeah! I forgot about that.” So every once in a while I think about it, but I haven’t put my resume back together, so it must not be serious. It’s nice to know there are jobs out there I could do, though.

Deborah said she appreciates the fact that she could financially support her family if needed.

In the future, Deborah said she may continue to stay at home once her children are in school. She explained,

I always thought that people who stay at home went back to work when their kids went to school. But this is the first community I’ve lived in knowing people who didn’t, who stayed at home the whole time. And I’ve talked to moms of older children who think it’s more valuable to be at home for them when they’re teenagers than even when they’re preschoolers.

She added, “I think that would be nice [for the kids] to be able to get off the bus and say, ‘Hey, guess what I did at school today, Mom!’” She said she also hopes to be free to attend activities at her children’s school. Deborah’s decision about whether to work or stay at home in the future will depend on whether she feels a personal or financial need to work. She concluded, “I’ll stay flexible and see what works, I guess. If we can continue to afford me staying at home, we’ll see how it goes.”

Cassie

Cassie said she feels lucky to be a stay-at-home mother for Brock, age 1 ½; she is also expecting a new baby in a few months. Cassie said she enjoys taking care of others and has always known that when she had children she wanted to stay at home. She said, “I think some people are

meant to be stay-at-home moms; they've got that nurturing personality." She added, "I've always kind of had that motherly instinct....even from a very young age." Cassie said she feels fortunate to be able to watch her son, Brock, grow up. She explained,

It's wonderful to see your child go through the so many changes that they experience in such a short frame of time. I love that. I feel lucky that I get to do that. I feel like I'm the one molding him into who he's going to become later on rather than sending him to a daycare.

Cassie said she appreciates being able to focus on Brock and her husband, Brian, each evening rather than having to come home and clean or pay bills after a long day at work.

Cassie and Brian have been married 13 years and, until Brock's birth, they were both employed. Cassie worked as a department manager at a major department store and as an office assistant, after which she completed a degree in elementary education at Iowa State just 3 months before Brock's birth. Cassie intentionally chose to pursue a degree in a field that would allow her to work family-friendly hours if she ever decided to work again after having children. Cassie explained that Brian wanted her to finish school before Brock was born so they could be financially and emotionally ready for a child. She said,

I was ready to start a family, I think, a few years before my husband was. He really pushed for me to finish school before we started. He wanted me to have that out of the way and not have to worry about it.

Cassie said she and Brian agreed that it would be best if one parent stayed at home with Brock. She explained,

His mindset on the whole thing is when you have two parents that work, neither one of them can give full attention to their job and neither one of them can give full attention to their family. So his thinking, and why he agreed that I should stay at home: he can give his whole attention at work.... He knows things are taken care of at home.

The decision for Cassie, rather than Brian, to be the stay-at-home parent was an easy decision. She explained,

He graduated from Iowa State in computer engineering. Very career-oriented, very focused.... I was always about having kids, staying home. I'm not that career-motivated, so it was never even an issue.

During a typical day at home, Cassie spends time playing with Brock and taking care of household tasks. Having a tidy, organized home is important to Cassie; therefore, she has a daily routine to help her keep her house clean. She said,

I always have to have my dishes cleaned up at night and the toys usually—I'd say maybe 90% of the time—I have the toys picked up. And then I feel at least the house is picked up....That always makes you feel better, at least me.

At times Cassie finds it challenging to accomplish her housework while simultaneously caring for Brock. She said,

He will play by himself, but he still kind of demands that attention every once in a while. So, what I find I can do is when he's playing nicely by himself I try and get things done around the house, or I'll have him follow me around. And then when he really needs that one-on-one time, then I'll just sit down. If I sit down and give him 20 minutes, play or wrestle with him or something, or whatever it is, as long as I give him that time, then I find he's OK for a little while longer. Then I can go on and do some more things without him.

Cassie said she sometimes dreams of having someone else to cook and clean for her so she could focus her energy entirely on Brock. However, she believes that taking care of the home is her job and she feels lucky to have household responsibilities instead of working outside the home.

Another challenge Cassie faces is not having enough free time. She said, "I think that's the hardest thing to come to terms with. I kind of thought that I would be able to have a little bit more free time." Cassie always imagined that once she had children and stayed at home, she would have extra time to spend on hobbies like scrap-booking. However, Cassie said it is difficult for her to make time for herself; instead, she feels obligated to stay busy with household tasks or with Brock. She said, "If I'm at home I feel I need to be taking care of [Brock] or taking care of things around the house and not sitting there doing my hobby."

Cassie said at times she has an urge to get out of the house and talk to other adults. She explained,

Are there days that I feel like I'm a little confined and I've seen too much baby? Yes! I just want to get out. Yeah, there are days like that. And sometimes that's when I'll go up to the store just to see other adults.... Some days I think, "Gosh, wouldn't it be nice to be able to go

to work and talk to adults. I'd be working, but talk to people all day." But then, I know I'd come home and I'd be crazy probably, but at least I would have talked to adults.

Even though Cassie would like more adult contact, she does interact with friends through her monthly Bunko group, as well as when she goes to the YMCA and takes Brock to the nursery while she works out and talks with some of her girlfriends. Nevertheless, she concluded, "I don't feel sometimes that I get that time away that I need—just me-time without having to worry about what's going on with him. I wish I had a little more of that, I guess."

Cassie said she has a good relationship with her husband, Brian. She enjoys taking care of things at home so he can concentrate on work during the day and can relax and play with Brock in the evenings. Cassie believes Brian appreciates her homemaker role. She said "I think he likes me being home so I can take care of him and take care of Brock." However, Cassie also believes that Brian would support her if she wanted to work.

After Brock's birth, Cassie said Brian initially had a hard time not receiving as much attention from Cassie as he did before Brock was born. She said,

My husband, you know, I think had a hard time at first dealing with that because he was the center of my attention and then this little life came.... [Brian] has certain needs and I have to remember that and take that into account and I can't always focus my attention on my son, that I have to remember him.... I think that's important for a marriage.

Cassie said she and Brian are not very comfortable leaving Brock with a babysitter, so they do not have a lot of time alone together except after Brock has gone to bed.

Cassie and her husband have a clear division of household labor. Brian cares for the lawn and other outside tasks, while Cassie is in charge of all the work inside the house. She said,

I totally want to be in charge of the house because I think it's part of my nature. I like to take care of things. I like to keep things organized. My idea of clean and organized is different than his idea of clean and organized, too, so if I want it done my way, I've got to do it my way. And that's how I've always been ever since we've been together, and we've been together 16 years, so I've created a monster. He's used to me taking care of him all the time.

Cassie said Brian often says she needs to ask for help more often. However, Cassie said she does not like to ask for help, instead wishing he could sense what she wants or needs. She said,

I expect this dream guy to sense that I need help, you know. And that's just not realistic. I'm sure there's some guys out there that do that, but my guy isn't one of them. But if I ask for help, he'll help me.

Cassie thinks Brian is a great father; however, she said he has been somewhat reluctant to take on some of the tasks associated with being a parent. She explained,

My husband—I love him dearly, he's a great daddy, he loves his son very much—but when he first came home he didn't want to take a lot of that responsibility. I don't think. He wanted me to do it—take care of him, nurture him—because he thought I knew what I was doing.... Now that [Brock's] older, he's more comfortable taking care of him, as long as it's not taking care of the responsibility; if it's just watching him and he's playing, that's fine, but when it comes to dinner time, bath time, bed time, it's still my responsibility.

Cassie said she believes Brian is willing to help with Brock, but she thinks things do not flow as smoothly when Brian cares for Brock because Brock is accustomed to the routine that Cassie provides. As a result, Cassie seldom leaves Brock at home with Brian unless Brock has already gone to bed for the evening.

Nurturing relationships with people is very important to Cassie, especially the relationships with the members of her family. She said Brock is her highest priority, followed by Brian, herself, and then other family and friends. Working is not important to Cassie at this time. She said,

I know that there are people who want to work and that's good for them, but for me it's so important to be able to be the one who's guiding [Brock] and telling him, you know, how things should be done.

Cassie makes a regular effort to visit Brock's grandmothers and great-grandmother because she feels it is important "...to make sure that Brock knows there are other people around that care about him and love him."

Cassie believes she is a good mother because she loves Brock and takes care of his needs. She said, "It doesn't matter how much money you have, what you buy your children, what you give them. All they want is you and to know that you love them and to have those needs taken care of." Cassie believes that "good" mothering is different for everyone and that career women can be ideal

mothers, too. She tries not compare herself to other mothers, but feels she is doing what is best for her family.

In the future, Cassie hopes to have two more children and stay home with them until they are all in school. She would also like a bigger house so they will have more room. Cassie expects to be busy taking her children to various activities once they are in school. so she would like to teach part time or substitute as an elementary school teacher rather than work full time because it would be flexible and she would not have to take her job home with her. She concluded, "Plus the hours would be when the kids are in school. To me, that just sounds ideal."

Kalleen

Being the full-time mother of two sons, Benjamin and Jacob, ages 2 and 1 respectively, is a rewarding and positive experience for Kalleen. She said, "Boy, I love my kids!" She continued, "I really don't know what I could be doing with my life right now that would be more rewarding, that would mean more to me." Next to her relationship to God, Kalleen says her family is the most important element of her life; she enjoys spending the day with her sons because it gives her the opportunity to teach and guide them. She said, "I'm influencing my kids now for their futures, and I can't say that I would have been doing that if I wasn't right there with them." She continued,

I am the person they spend the most time with, so I have the opportunity to communicate my values to them whenever issues may come up. Right now they may be as simple as "Do you know why it is naughty to push down Jacob and take his toy?" but as they grow situations will become more complex. If they spent the majority of their waking hours with someone else, I could not be sure that any advantage was being taken of moments they are open to values being imparted, or how closely those values they were learning mirrored mine.

Prior to staying at home, Kalleen worked outside the home full time in a supervisory position at a bio-resources company, and later as a production line worker at a manufacturing company until Jacob was born and Benjamin was 19 months old. While she worked, a care provider named Mona cared for Benjamin in their home. Kalleen said she decided to stay at home because she realized her income would be very small after she deducted the cost of child care for two children, as well as the

income they would lose from being in a higher tax bracket. She said she had also read books highlighting the importance of attachment and early childhood development and she did not want to miss out on her children's growth and daily experiences.

Life was more stressful and exhausting before Kalleen began staying home full time. She explained.

I was a lot more tired. It's not that I get more sleep at night than I did before, but I think there was added stress when you're a mom plus full time at another job. you're working two jobs. Potentially you've got the stresses from both of them weighing on you. If you can just cut down to one job, you eliminate some of that stress. I'm much more relaxed, and my husband has noticed that—that I'm more relaxed and more cheerful and more patient than I was.

She concluded, "I think I feel happier about what I'm doing with my life right now."

Being a full-time mother, rather than working, has been valuable in other ways, too. For example, Kalleen believes she and her husband, Josh, have learned to be more frugal. They now spend less money on entertainment and eating out, and Kalleen shops for her family's clothes at garage sales. Kalleen also has a more flexible schedule now; she appreciates being able to nap during the day sometimes, which she could not do when she was employed. Additionally, she believes she can give more love and attention to her children than a daycare provider could. She said,

I think parents love their kids and are even sacrificially devoted to them, whereas I don't think any other caregiver, except maybe grandparents, would be quite that devoted to your kids and their well-being and wanting everything to be just right for them. Many care providers genuinely care for the children in their charge, but love and devotion are something more.

Kalleen said she is also glad she can witness the exciting and funny things her kids do or say, such as calling lightning bugs "Blinkin'-butt bugs."

Although staying at home is mostly a positive experience, Kalleen believes it can also be somewhat monotonous. She said, "There's kind of a tedium involved in small child care. There's diapers, there's bottles, there's hardly any down time, so I guess that would be a downside." When she began staying at home, Kalleen initially struggled with having a less structured schedule, so she now tries to follow a daily routine that outlines when lunchtime, naptime, and bedtime take place, and

which helps her keep up with her housework. Benjamin and Jacob can mess the house up very quickly. She explained,

It takes them about two minutes to drag out everything in the house and have it strewn all over the floor. And I have to decide, “Well, do I want to pick it up 500 times or do I just want to let it set for a while and pick it all up at the end of the day?”

Other challenges include when Benjamin and Jacob become overly cranky and fussy and when they will not nap at the same time.

Kalleen now has to make a greater effort to have adult contact, which is important to her because it gives her the opportunity to talk about adult topics rather than about Benjamin’s favorite book, for example. Kalleen believes contact with other adults is also important for her children. She said,

I think it’s possible that they don’t get exposed to other people, to get—I don’t want to say excessively attached—but to where they can’t be with anybody other than Mom or Dad, whoever is the full-time care provider.

Therefore, Kalleen and her sons interact with other adults and children in a number of settings.

Kalleen said, “I’ve actually been really lucky in finding a couple of other moms in the area that I can call and say, ‘OK, I’m doing this right now. Can you just talk to me for a little while?’” She continued, “We have other stay-at-home moms and their kids come over and we go places. I volunteer regularly and leave the kids with Mona, actually, who used to babysit Benjamin. So we try to kind of escape that way.” On Wednesdays Kalleen puts Benjamin and Jacob in the stroller and they do a short paper route, and on Fridays she watches a friend’s daughter for a couple of hours. Kalleen and her children also enjoy going outside, going to the City Hall play gym, or going to the park. Kalleen and her husband also teach confirmation together, and they frequently visit family on the weekends. She concluded, “So our days are fairly varied.”

While she does not have as much free time as she would like, Kalleen regularly does things just for herself. For example, Kalleen describes herself as a “voracious reader,” so at times she’ll read

for a few minutes when her children are playing quietly. Often she will also stay up late to be alone.

She said,

When I read, it's usually after [they've] gone to bed. And sometimes after my husband has gone to bed, too. I'll stay up for another half hour, 45 minutes, and that's my "Oh, it's time for me. I can read something for fun, or I can take a nice bath, or just veg. in front of the television if I want to." It's kind of nice to have a little bit of time like that.

Kalleen said she is highly satisfied with her marriage. She said, "I really respect my husband and I think that he respects me." She added, "He's a fantastic guy. I'm really lucky." Kalleen appreciates the fact that Josh supports and understands her role as a stay-at-home mother. She said, "Josh is supportive and a wonderful guy and understands that being at home is not sitting on the couch watching soaps and eating bon-bons, or spending the day shopping." She continued, "And he does tell me sometimes, 'I really appreciate you. I know you're working really hard.'" She is glad that Josh considers the money he earns as both of their money, unlike some husbands she has read or heard about who monopolize financial decisions. Kalleen and Josh consult each other on all large purchases.

Josh currently works full time as an engineer, and he is also writing a dissertation so he can graduate with a Ph.D. in civil engineering in May. Kalleen said she chose to be the stay-at-home parent because Josh made more money than she did. She added, "I think I wanted to stay home more than he did.... he's a wonderful man, but I have more patience towards the kids than he does." Although Kalleen does most of the housework, Josh helps by doing the laundry and some vacuuming. Kalleen said, "Actually I was doing the laundry for a while and he started to feel guilty. [He said], 'I feel like I'm not doing anything at all'He wanted to do something so he felt like he's helping out." Kalleen said she does not mind doing most of the housework because she is at home most of the day and because her kids enjoy being involved and believe they are "helping." Still, she said at times she would like Josh to help more with the dishes.

Kalleen said she feels that most of her friends and family have a positive view of her role as a full-time mother. Her husband's parents are very supportive, and Kalleen said her mother believes she is "a decent, respectable contribution to society." However, at times Kalleen has talked to people with a negative reaction of her mothering role. She said, "Occasionally you'll run into people who will [say], 'Yeah, OK, you can't be that smart if all you do is stay home with kids.'" She said she also feels some hostility from her sister-in-law, who works full time. Kalleen believes it is not easy to understand what a full-time mother does unless you have long-term experience with small children. She said, "Unless you've taken care of a small child before, you probably don't have a lot of understanding.... It takes a lot of time and energy." She added, "You want to be teaching them and engaging their little minds and helping them understand things, so it's more than just, 'Here, you go play with that. I'm going to go over here.'" She believes that even daycare providers cannot completely understand full-time mothering because they only work 8-hour shifts part of the week and get to go home and get a full night's sleep, while stay-at-home mothers work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Kalleen believes that she is a good mother. She strives to ensure that she is fair and that her kids feel unconditionally loved. She said, "I would like each of my kids to think that they're my favorite." She also thinks that ideal mothering depends on the mother and the children. She said, "I think it might be different for different people. For each child's temperament there might be a different ideal mother to deal with that temperament." Kalleen recognizes that staying home full time is "not for everybody." She admires her own mother, who was a working single mother until Kalleen was 12. She said, "I don't know how she did it. I really look up to her for that. I hope my own kids can look back and think that about me once they're grown." She continued, "I don't think I've turned out incompetent or anything, so I can't say that moms shouldn't have jobs. I think my mom was wonderful and she worked full time all my life."

One day Kalleen and Josh would like to move to Montana where Josh hopes to teach at a university. They would like to have four or five children, and while the children are small, Kalleen plans to stay at home with them and potentially home school them. Kalleen has considered going back to school to get a teaching degree, or she might study to become a director of religious education (DRE) and continue to teach confirmation classes. Once their children are grown, Kalleen would enjoy breeding exotic birds or traveling with Josh.

Kalleen summarized her feelings about being a stay-at-home mother with a quote that she has found to be personally inspiring. She said,

I ...wanted to share with you a quote from Jackie Kennedy Onassis: "If you bungle raising your children, I don't think whatever else you do well matters very much." I think that is why most of those of us who decide to dedicate a season of our lives to raising our children do it. My children are my most significant and lasting contribution to the world. I want to do my best for them.

Anne

"There is no other job in the world that is so challenging that you feel inadequate regularly, but you love it," replied Anne when asked to describe being a stay-at-home mother for two children, Malinna, age 4 and Blake, age 2. While growing up, Anne said she never planned to stay at home with her kids. She said,

I never had aspirations of being a mother. I wanted to be kind of a corporate girl. Or I wanted to write books and do things. I always thought I'd have a family, but I never imagined I'd be a homemaker.

Anne and her husband Dillon were both students and were working when their first child Malinna was born. At that time, Anne began feeling a desire to be a stay-at-home mother because she felt a strong sense of responsibility for Malinna. She said,

It felt like the right thing to do. Once I had her I felt this huge responsibility for her. And I wanted her taken care of and I wanted it done right. And only I knew what I thought right was, so I had to do it.... I wanted to be a stay-at-home mom because of that responsibility, for as much time as I could as my children were growing up.

Dillon and Anne took turns caring for Malinna, rather than putting her in daycare, while Anne completed her Master's degree and Dillon completed his undergraduate degree.

When Malinna was 2 ½ years old, Dillon started in a graduate program at Iowa State, and Anne began teaching an undergraduate course to help make ends meet. Anne's second child, Blake, was also born during that time. However, Anne said juggling motherhood and working became difficult and she experienced feelings of guilt. She said,

I realized I was trading their time for a couple hundred dollars and it felt wrong. It just felt wrong to me. I'd look at their little faces and I felt like I was making the wrong decision because of this responsibility I had for them.

Anne decided to stop working. Anne, rather than Dillon, chose to be the full-time parent because Anne could fulfill her career goal of writing while at home, while Dillon's career aspirations could be fulfilled only outside the home. Anne said she also felt it would be difficult to breastfeed Blake if she were working. She said,

...the mother is the one that has to do that every two hours and it just seems ridiculous for her to go to work and stop every two hours to pump milk to send home when you're just physically equipped to take better care of the child in the first year at least.

Being a stay-at-home mother is at times challenging for Anne. One challenge is that Anne is very busy. She said, "You just can't be bored because there's too much to do, too much to do." Anne said she is often exhausted because she typically sleeps only 5 to 6 hours each night and her children require a lot of physical energy. Another problem Anne faces is feeling judged by others, such as when people frown on how she manages her kids, or when people think mothering is petty. She said,

People ask me what do I do and I say I'm a mom. They're like, "Oh, you have no other aspirations?" I'm like, "Of course I have aspirations! It doesn't mean that they're more important than being a mom." So I feel bad sometimes about that, kind of like I'm a second-class citizen.

Perhaps the greatest challenge Anne confronts is a general feeling of inadequacy as a mother. She said, "There's no other job where you have the potential for feeling like a complete idiot everyday, because there's no manual. There's no instruction booklet for each child and they're all

different....” Anne said she struggles with knowing how to handle the inappropriate behaviors that her children often exhibit quite suddenly, such as biting. She said,

Everyday there’s some moment when my children do something new that they’ve never done before—some tantrum in some place, like I’m in the middle of the jewelry store or something.... Those are the kinds of times when I feel really inadequate, because I don’t have—not just no plan B but no plan A to deal with this. Those are times I can’t control.

Anne said she also feels inadequate when she becomes angry with her children. She explained,

Being angry at a child and talking to them angrily, at least with my children, doesn’t help. So that’s when I feel really inadequate. I come home and say, “I can’t do this! I don’t have the patience. I don’t have the endurance. I don’t have the ability to live well with 5 hours of sleep!”

Although motherhood can be challenging, Anne said she feels there are many rewards that buoy her up when she feels inadequate. First, she receives external rewards, such as words of appreciation or art projects from Malinna, which let Anne know she is loved. Second, she also experiences some internal rewards that come from a sense of accomplishment. She explained,

The internal [rewards] would be when I conquer something in myself. When I’m having a hard time being patient and not yelling, but then I conquer it, that’s a big reward to me. That feels really good. Let’s say I’m tired, but there’s still a few more things in the house I have to do and put the children to bed and I get all that done, that’s really rewarding. I feel like I’ve accomplished a lot because I’ve gotten over the fatigue and done more than, sometimes I feel more than most people do in their 8-hour job or whatever, because mine doesn’t end at 5:00.

Being a stay-at-home parent is beneficial in other ways, as well. Anne enjoys doing fun activities with her children, such as taking walks, and she likes determining her own schedule. Anne also believes being a stay-at-home mom is the best situation for her children because it allows them to gain a sense of ethics and morals. She explained,

If they’re at home with Mom, say—it could be Dad, it doesn’t matter which—but if they’re at home with them all day long they’ll see and observe—and they’re very good at observing—how I make decisions and why. And if I am behaving in a certain way they’ll start picking that up.... If there isn’t a central place where children learn what’s right and wrong, what’s kind and what’s unkind, I don’t think you can consciously teach it. You have to get it by observing people long-term.

Anne also appreciates knowing her children are safe and not having to worry about them all day, and she values the opportunity she has to teach her children. She said,

I'm the one that tells them stories and gets them started learning about our society and I like that.... I feel safer knowing that if I found out they don't know something, I can help them learn it. I've been here from the beginning. I know what they know and what they don't know.

Being aware of what her children know and do each day helps Anne to better anticipate their needs, and it allows her to correct misbehavior immediately rather than hearing about it after the fact from a daycare provider. Finally, even though her children do not interact with other children in an organized daycare setting, Anne said she believes her children experience the benefit of social interaction through playgroups and at the playground.

Anne said she has noticed several changes in her life since she began staying home full time. First, Anne has felt a stronger desire to be a good mother. She said, "Since I am at home, it's been more important to me to do a great job being a mom. If this is going to be my job, I want to do it well. Whereas before I was just trying to get by." Additionally, Anne said her relationship with Dillon has become closer as a result of being at home full time. She explained,

My relationship with my husband is a lot closer. I rely more on him, he relies more on me because I don't have this huge network of friends in my workplace that I talk to or tell my fears and aspirations to. I just have him, because he's my main contact.

Anne has also noticed that getting out of the house has become more important since she now lacks the adult contact she used to receive at work. She said,

It became very important to get contact with other adults—not just mothers to ask questions and talk about being a mom, but just other adults to talk about things kids can't talk about. "What do you think about God? Why do you think the universe spins this way?"

Anne now makes a greater effort to interact with others, either through phone calls or by getting a babysitter so she can leave the house. Early each morning, Anne goes walking with a friend before Dillon leaves for work. She also enjoys having contact with others from her church and completing larger-scale projects, which she cannot do when her children are around. She said,

I work in the primary, which is like the young Sunday school group. When I do service projects or teaching classes or whatever, I work with them. I feel a lot of intellectual satisfaction or social satisfaction from working with others, from getting work accomplished, because when you work at home you're constantly interrupted and it's very infrequently that

you get a complete job done in a day, because even when it's naptime and quiet time, every 10 minutes there's something that interrupts. So it's really satisfying being able to complete things, work with others, and see a job finished.

Anne and Dillon also go on a weekly date together so they can talk and "have some stress release."

Having time for herself each day is important to Anne. She gets up at 5:30 every morning to have time alone, and when Blake is napping, Anne encourages Malinna to have quiet time so she can have time to do larger household projects or to write. Once her children are in bed, Anne said she enjoys talking to Dillon, planning the next day, or taking a hot shower alone.

Anne has a clear idea of the characteristics that comprise an ideal mother. She said,

I think an ideal mother would be one that stays home with their children, one that is patient and encouraging, but firm when their children—gives them limits so they know what is good and bad, where the boundaries are for their behaviors. One that doesn't yell but explains that it's OK to be angry, it's not OK to yell, or fight, or hurt people. Not a suppressed person, but a well-balanced, calm person.... The perfect mother would be focused on her child and her husband—not the children over the husband—but on her family, but in a reasonable way. Not sacrificing her health or other things that are important to be a whole person.

Anne's role models include her own mother and her mother-in-law. Anne said,

My mother has a great personality and sense of humor and she's always been my friend, which was very important.... She's also very determined and self-sacrificing and I admire what she gave up for us. She had six children, and she had other dreams, but the children came along and she didn't expect her husband to be sick, but she just did what needed to be done and took care of us and I admire her for that. I also admire my mother-in-law because her children are everything to her.... She smiles when they cry. She smiles when they throw fits. She smiles when they are happy. She just enjoys them and enjoys being with them and watching them, playing with them, and I hadn't met anyone like that before, that just enjoyed all of the parts. And I think that's ideal in a mother because of course you're not always going to have happy, clean children.

Anne's said her highest priority involves living a moral life, namely, trying to be a good person, to learn about Jesus, and to live guilt-free. Fulfilling her first priority helps her achieve her other priorities, including, in order, strengthening her relationship with Dillon, being a good mother to her children, and supporting her extended family and friends. Anne believes that although keeping her home clean is important, it is not one of her top priorities.

Anne believes she and Dillon have a high-quality marriage relationship and that they could work through any problems that might come up. She described,

I think we have it really good because you know how people say it's supposed to be a partnership and all that? I think we really do have that. I don't feel like there's anything that could crop up that we couldn't work through. And I don't feel like I would have to be dominating or he would have to be dominating in order to work through it and to have a solution that would be fair, reasonable, and good. I'm really happy with the way things are.

Anne and Dillon are flexible about household tasks; they both tend to do whatever they feel needs to be done. Although Dillon helps with the children, the bills, or the laundry when he returns home from work in the evenings, Anne said she takes care of most of the household tasks throughout the day. She also feels she does more of the work related to child rearing, even when Dillon is home. She explained,

The kids automatically come to you even if the other parent's home.... even if you're in the middle of something and the other parent's there, and the other parent will automatically not notice that the children need something because that's not what they do all day.... So frequently I will have to say, "Dillon, can you do this?" or "Dillon, can you help me?" And just point it out to him what he's not noticing. And that frustrates me.... I think ideally if you're a stay-at-home mom your full-time job should end when your partner comes home, and your job that you do together should begin. Ideally it should be like that, but there's still those differences in what you've done all day.

After Dillon graduates, Anne hopes they can settle in a nice community where Dillon can get a job he enjoys. She looks forward to having financial stability and a nice house with no leaks in the roof, helping with community functions and service projects, and she hopes her children will enjoy school. Anne would also like to have set hours when she can write and hopefully publish more of her work; she and Dillon also plan to have one or two more children. Finally, Anne anticipates that over time she will receive additional rewards related to being a mother. Anne quoted what her mother once told her: "All along you get little bits [of rewards] regularly and then at the end there's all these huge rushes of gratitude and rewards when your children are grown and they're your friends."

Individual Profiles of the Part-Time Stay-At-Home Mothers

Like the full-time stay-at-home mothers, the part-time stay-at-home mothers provided me with demographic information and completed the RSE, KPS, KMS, and SWLS. This information is presented in Table 2. Again, all names have been changed to ensure confidentiality. The mean self-esteem and satisfaction scores for the part-time group were quite similar to the means reported by the full-time group, except the satisfaction with life score seems much lower: RSE: $\underline{M} = 36.43$; KPS: $\underline{M} = 18.43$; KMS: $\underline{M} = 18.43$; SWLS: $\underline{M} = 29.14$.

Similar to the full-time group, there appears to be little variation in most of the part-time stay-at-home mothers' individual scores for the self-esteem and satisfaction measures. However, four specific scores seem to stand out. First, Jacqui had a perfect self-esteem score, or the highest self-esteem score possible. Jacqui also reported a marital satisfaction score that was somewhat lower than the other mothers in the part-time group. Additionally, Stacey reported a seemingly lower satisfaction with parenting score, and an extremely low satisfaction with life score. It is likely that Stacey's extremely low SWLS score influenced the mean SWLS score reported previously. The interview with Stacey seems to resonate with her KPS and SWLS scores. Specifically, as Stacey's individual narrative report following Table 2 indicates, she reported being extremely unhappy that she had to work and send her daughter to day care: I believe this unhappiness had a strong influence on her scores for these measures.

Each individual mother's scores from these measures of self-esteem, and satisfaction with life, parenting, and marriage can be compared with their verbal statements in the individual narrative reports listed subsequent to Table 2, providing the reader with a more comprehensive view of each mother's experiences with mothering.

Table 2. Part-time stay-at-home mothers' individual profiles

	<u>Jacqui</u>	<u>Stacey</u>	<u>Lori</u>	<u>Meredith</u>
Age	23	27	29	29
Education	AA/2-year degree	BS/BA	BS/BA	BS/BA
Annual Family Income	\$10,000-\$19,999	\$20,000-\$29,999	\$50,000-\$59,999	\$90,000-\$99,999
Reported Spiritual/ Religious Orientation	Spiritual, but not religious	Not spiritual, not religious	Spiritual and religious; Methodist	Spiritual and religious; Baptist
Employment History	Retail management, full-time; began current job when child was 2	Asst. supervisor for large store, full-time; medical billing, night shift; began current job when child was 2	Substitute teacher, part-time; cosmetic consultant, part-time	Computer specialist, full-time; began current job when child was 3 weeks old
Current Employment	Apartment manager, 15 hours/week	Transit bus driver, 15-20 hours/week	Cosmetic consultant, 10 hours/week in home, 10 hours/week outside of home	Loan technician, 24 hours/week
Years Married	3	4 ½	3 ½	6
Spouse Name, Age, Education, Occupation	Adam, age 29; BS/BA+; full-time graduate student	Richard, age 27; H.S. diploma+; info. technologist; part-time student	Danny, age 27; BS/BA; lab manager	Paul, age 28; BS/BA; computer consultant
Children's Names/Ages	Jasmine, age 2 ½	Ally, age 3	Layne, age 9 months	Carson, age 2
RSE Score	40	34	39	35
KPS Score	18	15	21	18
KMS Score	15	18	21	20
SWLS Score	31	15	32	30

Note. RSE = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (scores range from 10-40, higher score = higher SE);
 KPS = Kansas Parental Satisfaction Scale (scores range from 3-21, higher score = higher sat.);
 KMS = Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (scores range from 3-21, higher score = higher mar. sat.);
 SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale (scores range from 5-35, higher score = higher life sat.).

Table 2. (continued)

	Patricia	Carol	Drea
Age	35	36	30
Education	BS/BA	BS/BA	BS/BA
Annual Family Income	\$70,000-\$79,999	\$90,000-\$99,999	\$40,000-\$49,999
Reported Spiritual & Religious Orientation	Spiritual and religious: Catholic	Spiritual and religious: Methodist	Spiritual, but not religious
Employment History	Social worker, full-time; reduced hours to 20-25 hours/week after birth of 2 nd child	Pharmacist, full-time; reduced hours to 32 and 20 hours/week after birth of 1 st & 2 nd child respectively	Billing supervisor, full-time; reduced to part-time when child was 4 months; insurance, part-time
Current Employment	Social worker, 20-25 hours/week	Pharmacist, 20 hours/week	Medical clinic office assistant, 23 hours/week
Years Married	11	5	5 ½
Spouse Name, Age, Education, Occupation	Luke, age 34: BS/BA: mortgage loan officer	Rob, age 33: BS/BA: pharmacist	Dave, age 29: H.S. diploma: company site manager
Children's Names/Ages	Andrew, age 5 Laura, age 3	Bryant, age 2 ½ Jocelyn, 6 months	Wade, age 3
RSE Score	31	38	38
KPS Score	18	20	19
KMS Score	15	21	19
SWLS Score	29	35	32

Part-Time Stay-at-Home Mothers' Experiences of Motherhood and Mothering

Jacqui

Jacqui describes herself as a “mother who works part time.” Jacqui works about 15 hours weekly as an apartment manager and appreciates the extra time she can spend with her daughter, Jasmine, age 2. Jacqui completely overhauled her lifestyle recently so she could see her daughter more often. Previously, Jacqui worked, using her own word, an “insane” number of hours—often 50 or 60 hours a week—in retail management in Denver. The commute to and from work added an additional 2 hours during which she was away from her husband and daughter. Jacqui generally felt torn between her career and her family. She said, “I was just so unhappy and I felt like my daughter was growing up without me.”

Following a move back to Iowa, which put Jacqui and her husband Adam closer to their families, Adam began attending Iowa State and Jacqui again worked full time in retail management. However, at one point she realized her long hours at work were hurting her daughter’s feelings. Jacqui explained,

When she and Adam, my husband, used to drop me off [at work], she used to cry and say, “Mommy, don’t go!” And then one day, she didn’t cry anymore! She just wouldn’t even look at me.... It hurt her feelings so bad. And I think that it was the next week that I decided to quit.

Now Jacqui works part time at a very family-friendly, flexible job that gives her more time to be with her family. Jacqui does not stay home full time because she and Adam need the extra income while Adam is in school and because Jacqui said she feels that working is good both for her and for her daughter. Jasmine attends child care part time. During that time Jacqui has the opportunity to work at her job, do some household tasks, and prepare for the opening of her own retail clothing store in a few months.

On the days Jacqui is not working, she devotes all her time to Jasmine. They plan fun activities, such as going on walks or spending time with Jacqui’s sister or other family members.

Jacqui currently seems satisfied with how her life is arranged. She realizes that Jasmine will only be young once. She said, "We'll never have this opportunity again. And I know that I'll never regret it."

Jacqui enjoys many different aspects of motherhood. She particularly enjoys talking about the clever things Jasmine does. She said, "I always talk about my child. That's in every conversation that I have!" Jacqui described their "family bed time," during which she, Adam, and Jasmine lounge around in bed together. It is particularly rewarding for Jacqui when Jasmine says, "I love you" or calls her "Honey" or "Mommy-baby."

Jacqui also experiences some frustrations related to her role as a part-time stay-at-home mother. One challenge is that she and Adam now live on one seventh of the income they earned when they both worked full time. Jacqui also finds it frustrating when she cannot accomplish everything she wants to do in a day, as well as when she needs to deal with the typical antics of a 2-year-old, such as when Jasmine drops food on the floor, colors on the walls, or refuses to get dressed.

Jacqui described her marital relationship with her husband as "pretty good." Since Jacqui began working part time, she believes she and Adam are more domestically-oriented because they spend more time at home and with each other and Jasmine. Jacqui explained, "We see each other a lot more, which is good and bad." One of Jacqui's priorities in life is to help her husband find personal fulfillment.

At times Jacqui and Adam struggle with how to divide household responsibilities. She explained,

We try to keep things cluttered, yet clean. That's our goal. Completely neat will never, ever happen.... But for division of household responsibilities, it kind of changes. I think he should do more. But he probably thinks I should do more too.

Jacqui and Adam also tend to have slightly different views of parenting at times. For example, Jacqui said she generally tries to be flexible with Jasmine while Adam tends to be more rigid. Jacqui said,

He will decide that she needs to wear a certain pair of pants and that's the end of it. She's going to wear those pants and it's a terrible experience for both of them.... I try to decide she's going to wear a pair of pants, and then if she decides she's going to wear something

different—whatever.... He thinks I give in too much, but if I don't have a good reason. I try to be flexible.

Since she began working part time, Jacqui spends more time with extended family and friends, both of which provide her with social, emotional, and physical support. Jacqui's parents and siblings not only help watch Jasmine when needed, but her parents are helping her financially with some of the funding for her new business. Jacqui also has more meaningful friendships now that she works less, especially with friends who have children. She said, "My relationship with friends has been better because of [working part time]—just because of the simple fact that I have more time to devote to people." Jacqui concluded, "Time is such a luxury!"

Several factors help determine what Jacqui considers to be "good" mothering. First, Jacqui believes that in order to help their children feel happy, mothers need to determine their personal values and priorities, do what feels right, and do what makes them happy. She explained,

I think that I try to do what makes me feel good, like what feels right to myself. And I know that my values and my priorities are different from what anybody else's are going to be, but I feel really good about myself for trying to figure out what's important to me and sticking with what I do.

She also said, "I really feel sorry for people that do what they feel like they ought to be doing instead of what they know they should be doing internally." Jacqui believes all mothers need to take time to do things for themselves, too. She explained,

A problem with a lot of stay-at-home moms is that they don't ever do anything for themselves! And I really think that you can't be a good parent if you're not a happy person, even if you fake it!

Jacqui also measures her worth as a mother by watching Jasmine play with her dolls. She explained,

I feel like I'm doing a good job parenting when I watch her play with herself because she'll play with her dolls and she'll pat them on the head and she'll say, "It's okay, don't cry. Be happy".... That's role play. She's pretending that she's a parent.

Jacqui believes she is a good mother even though she said she is not a "maternal" person, which she described as someone similar to the stereotypical mother of the 1950s. Jacqui has no specific role-

model mother, but she is influenced by a mixture of people. Jacqui wants to give Jasmine every advantage she can, protect her from negative messages from the media, and help her grow up with high self-esteem and the confidence to voice her opinions.

Although Jacqui works part time now, she plans to work full time again in the near future. She explained that she has always had career aspirations. She said, “I swear some people say that you can’t have both—you can’t have a good family life and a good career. I might be naïve, but I think you can. So I’m going to do it for myself.” Rather than accepting a job that would take her away from her family, however, Jacqui plans to be her own boss and create a family-friendly environment for herself and for her employees. In fact, Jacqui hopes to be featured in *Working Mother* magazine for offering her employees a family-friendly workplace. While fulfilling her personal career goals, Jacqui plans to be free to pick her daughter up from school and continue spending time going for walks and doing other things she and Jasmine enjoy. Jacqui’s first priority will always be raising a “really healthy, happy child.” Nevertheless, Jacqui will continue to focus on finding the optimal balance between her family and her career. She said, “The key to life is having a balance between all your different components.... I’m always trying to find a happy medium between spending time with family and still having a career.”

Stacey

“At least I get to spend some time with her,” replied Stacey in reference to her 3-year-old daughter, Ally, when asked about the benefits related to working part time. Stacey currently drives a public bus for a city transit system part time with the goal of earning a portion of the income she and her husband need to live on, while simultaneously spending as much time as possible with her daughter. Stacey would like to stay at home full time; however, she and her husband have decided that she should work part time so they can more easily pay their bills. Stacey explained, “We can’t do without the paycheck.” Stacey’s husband, Richard, currently works three quarters time and also takes classes.

Previous to working part time, Stacey worked nights while her husband worked during the day so they could take turns caring for their daughter and avoid taking her to daycare. However, they both found that situation to be taxing on their marriage. Stacey clarified,

It was a big strain on our marriage because we never saw each other.... We couldn't handle not seeing each other and spending time together.... We'd see each other in passing. One would be coming and the other would be going.

Now that Stacey works part time during daytime hours she and Richard have more opportunity to interact and have a healthier marriage relationship.

Although Stacey said she feels much happier since she stopped working nights and began working part time, she would enjoy staying home full time if she and her husband were financially secure primarily because she laments feeling forced to take her daughter to a babysitter. Based on literature Stacey has read, as well as some family members' recommendations, Stacey feels that daycare of any sort is not good for a child. She said,

Now that we take her to the babysitter we feel very guilty and sad when we drop her off.... Neither one of us likes to do it. I've been making my husband do it lately. But I've dropped her off, too. She'll just kind of stand there by the door and she won't immediately go and play with the other kids. She'll just kind of stand there and look at us. She always looks kind of perplexed. She doesn't like to go, and some days she'll say that she doesn't want to go at all. And she asks me almost everyday if she has to go. She'll say she doesn't want to go see the kids—she wants to stay home.

Stacey is also pregnant now and does not look forward to taking their new baby to the babysitter's. She explained,

When the second one comes along it's going to be really, really hard for me to take the baby to the babysitter because we didn't take Ally until she was 1 ½. We tried the swing shift. We tried everything so I could stay home. It's going to be very hard to take a little tiny baby to the babysitter.

In addition to the stress of dealing with child care, Stacey experiences pressure from extended family members, each of whom has their own idea about whether she should or should not be working.

Stacey elucidated, "[Richard's parents] want me to work more, my parents want me to work less, and Richard's aunt somehow doesn't want me to take her to daycare at all." Stacey also feels that working

part time causes her to miss out on some of Ally's daily experiences, and prevents Ally from having as much one-on-one time with her parents, which would help her to be better-prepared for preschool. Stacey wishes Ally would adopt more of her and Richard's traits rather than those of the babysitter. Consequently, Stacey and Richard try hard to limit the amount of time Ally spends at the babysitter: Stacey rushes to the sitter's as quickly as she can once her shift at work has ended.

Although Ally's child care is a strong disadvantage associated with working, Stacey does enjoy the opportunity her job provides her to get out of the house and interact with other adults. She explained, "It's kind of a catch-22. I like staying home with Ally, but I also like getting out some and interacting with adults some." She has several friends at work; however, she generally feels too busy to devote much time to her friendships. Stacey also enjoys the flexible hours and extra time off that accompany having a part-time rather than a full-time job. On the other hand, she does not receive health benefits and earns less, making it more difficult to pay the bills than it would be if she worked full time. Stacey does not work full time because she would not want to send Ally to daycare for 8 or more hours each day.

In her free time, Stacey tries to spend as much time as possible with Ally. They enjoy being in the garden, as well as going to the park or library. Stacey also spends some of her free time cleaning; however, she tries to clean only when Ally is napping. Stacey would particularly enjoy life if she never had to clean or run errands but could simply play with Ally all day. In Stacey's opinion, no mother lives up to the "ideal" presented in much of the child rearing literature. She said,

I don't think there's such a thing as an ideal mother, although a lot of those child psychology books—I'm reading one right now—has an idea of an ideal mother. An ideal mother is never angry, has a perfectly clean house and has all the developmentally appropriate toys laying around.

Instead of attempting to be "perfect," Stacey's goal is to be a cross between reality and the picture-perfect ideal presented in many books. She described several characteristics of what her personal ideal would be if she had the time, including cooking organic, healthy foods for Ally, home-

schooling her, and having more time to play with her. Many of Stacey's ideas about ideal mothering come from talking to neighbors and friends, from advice from her and Richard's parents, and from watching other mothers at the park. Stacey described,

You go to the park and you see the mothers pull out the gourmet lunches.... Especially with really little children you see a mom with the gourmet, homemade, puréed stuff and everything that I don't have time to do.

When asked if she feels she is a good mother, Stacey replied, "I hope so. Yeah, I do. I sure try hard enough."

In addition to spending as much time with Ally as possible, Stacey tries to spend time with her husband, Richard, as well as with her and Richard's parents. On the weekends Stacey, Richard, and Ally like to do family activities, like camping, and they frequently travel to visit Ally's grandparents in eastern Iowa. Stacey feels lucky to be married to Richard. Not only do they have a good marriage relationship but Stacey thinks Richard is an excellent father to Ally. Stacey described how helpful Richard was when Ally was an infant. She said, "I kind of had postpartum depression because I can't deal with a loss of sleep, and she was colicky. He would get up in the night and stay with her. So he's very good with her. I'm lucky."

Stacey and Richard have a relatively egalitarian relationship. They both do housework; interestingly, Stacey said they each feel they do more housework than the other. Stacey would not mind if Richard were the one to work part time and spend more time at home with Ally; however, they decided Stacey should be at home with Ally more because her job paid less than Richard's. At one point Richard was laid off from his job and as a result he stayed home with Ally full time while Stacey worked outside the home almost full time. Stacey is grateful he had that experience because it helped him more fully realize how time-consuming it can be to take care of children.

In the future, Stacey plans to take a maternity leave and spend time with her new baby. While her children are young, Stacey would prefer not to work at all, or to work from home. Once her

children are in school, however, she plans to work. Stacey hopes to have a job with “mother’s hours” that would allow her to be at work only when her children were at school. She said,

I think I’ll want to work. I think I would suffer from empty nest. It would be so quiet. And so many women work now—I don’t know what I’d do. Now when I’m at home with Ally I have trouble finding other adults that are at home.... So I think that if the kids weren’t at home I would go crazy. I would go crazy. But I think I would have to get a job [so] that I got home fairly early so I could get home when the kids got home.

Currently Stacey is slowly taking classes to complete a paralegal degree. Stacey hopes Ally will be successful in school and that Richard will one day complete a college degree so they can have more money and more time to do the things they want to do, such as taking vacations.

Lori

Lori is a self-employed cosmetic consultant who works approximately 20 hours per week, as well as a mother of an 8-month-old son, Layne. Lori’s cosmetic business is based out of her home, enabling her to spend the majority of her time at home with Layne. Lori said,

I enjoy it. It’s better than working full time. I have to say that the less hours I can work, the better. I’m kind of spoiled—I think I’m spoiled and lucky that I’m fortunate enough to be able to be home with my son. That’s always been a goal of mine in life. So I think it’s pretty nice. Plus, I’m in control of my own hours so I work when I want and that’s nice.

While at home, Lori’s work responsibilities include scheduling appointments with customers and overseeing the cosmetic consultants who work under her. Lori also works outside her home approximately 10-15 hours per week, holding cosmetic shows and delivering cosmetic products to her customers. Lori feels her job is a positive influence in her life. She explained,

With me, I love what I do.... I have so much fun. It’s positive. I have a reason to talk to people. I make great money. I’m able to be at home. The list goes on and on and on and on. I get prizes. I get rewarded. I have great friends from it. The benefits to me are endless.

Lori’s job also allows her the flexibility to cook or take care of household tasks, play with Layne, or leave and go shopping whenever she wants. Lori appreciates not having to rush in order to be ready for work early in the morning.

Although there are many positives to her home-based business, Lori believes working at home provides many opportunities for her to become sidetracked. Lori explained that she will sometimes say to herself, “‘Oh, I’m just going to stay at home today and spend time with Layne and work in my office instead of going out and working my business like I need to.” Moreover, there are days when Layne does not take his usual nap, which causes Lori to miss valuable work time. Other challenges Lori has faced, related specifically to motherhood, include determining what Layne needs when he is crying or upset, as well as losing the attention and compliments she received when she was pregnant as people now focus more on Layne. Lori also experienced a period of post-partum depression after Layne’s birth, and she has worked hard to get back into physical shape after her pregnancy. Nevertheless, Lori enjoys the majority of her role as a mother who works part time. She concludes, “For the most part, I don’t see very many negatives.”

Prior to selling cosmetics, Lori initially planned to be a teacher and even worked briefly as a substitute elementary teacher. However, selling cosmetics provided a larger income, and Lori also wanted a job that would allow her to be a stay-at-home mother, a role which both her mother and her husband’s mother had filled. Additionally, Lori was not fond of the idea of sending her son to daycare. She said, “With what’s going on in the world today, I’d much rather be home with my kids than have to bring them to somebody else. You can only trust so many people.” She continued,

Sometimes, you know, you’ll have teachers that really do care about the kids, and then you’ll have ones that don’t. ... They get paid minimum wage. Half of them don’t have the education of how to work with kids. And, um, you’ll see a kid be dropped off by their parents and be crying most of the day because they want their mom. That’s just kind of sad to me. And I know some parents and some families don’t have a choice or maybe that’s not something they want to do—is be home with their kids. But I just knew that I would never do that with my kids. I just didn’t want to.

When asked whether she describes herself as a “good” mother, Lori responded, “I’m an awesome mom!” She believes she is a good mother because Layne is healthy and well cared for, and because he likes people and people like him. She explained,

I have somebody come up to me every day that's attracted to him, "Oh, he has such beautiful blue eyes," and he'll just look and smile and make noise. So I guess because of the way that he reacts I know I'm a good mom, and because I have patience and because I'm willing to learn what I need to do to teach him what he needs to know or take care of him.

Lori strongly believes good parents engage in redirection rather than spanking or yelling.

Lori has a clear sense of her values and priorities. When asked to list her life priorities from most to least important, Lori responded, "Well, my faith and my family first. Put my career last. And then all the other stuff in between, I guess." Spending time together as a family is Lori's favorite activity. Lori and her husband have goals to always sit down together for dinner as a family and to have Sunday be their family day. She said,

We made Sunday our family day. We try and do something fun, whether it be go out and see a movie... or just sit at home and veg. out and watch movies all day. That's our day to not think of anything.

Lori also recently discovered her own personal faith or spirituality and joined a nearby congregation.

Lori explained,

Just recently in the past few months here I just found my faith and joined a church and we just had my son baptized on Sunday. And I feel that because I've done that, that's where I've come over that hill where now I know that I'm not alone.

Lori described enjoying a supportive, close marital relationship with her husband, Danny. Her favorite time of day is when Danny returns home from work. Lori believes she and Danny communicate and resolve conflicts effectively, and she thinks Danny is supportive. She said, "He's pretty good about just knowing what my needs are and having them met." Lori appreciates the encouragement her husband often provides. She said, "Danny is so great because he says, 'You're a great mom, honey. You did a good job today.'" Lori said she feels Danny is happy that she stays at home with their son, and although she sometimes thinks he would also enjoy staying home with Layne, she believes Danny enjoys working to provide for his family. Lori concluded, "Um, I think I just wanted it more than he did—for me to be able to be at home." Nevertheless, Lori believes Danny is just as good a father as she is a mother.

Lori and Danny both participate in household work. They take turns with some tasks, such as making dinner, and they divide other tasks, such as laundry or taking out the garbage. In general, Lori and Danny simply do the jobs they most enjoy or which they are best able to accomplish. For example, Lori loads the dishwasher because she feels she does a better job with it. She explained,

You have certain quirky-nesses, I guess, and for me I feel like I load the dishwasher better than he does. When he does, he shoves it in there and it comes out not clean. I know it sounds really picky, but.... And I've gotten a lot better. I used to be really bad. I was really picky. But I've learned to accept that what he does needs to be good enough.

Lori said Danny generally knows what she expects regarding specific household tasks. She said, "He's just really good about now knowing what I like to have done. He'll unload the dishwasher, I'll load it. He doesn't do clothes but he's supposed to fold. You know, there are certain rules that we've established." Lori explained that because Danny helps with the housework, she is accepting of his out-of-home hobbies, such as rock climbing.

Lori has a close relationship with her parents; they are supportive but not judgmental or pushy. They do not demand that she and Danny visit or meet other "obligations." Instead, they just want Lori and Danny to do what makes them happy. Lori described how her dad once said, "The two of you come first. We're second." Lori's parents are happy with her career choice and with her decision to be at home with Layne for most of the day. On the other hand, Lori feels that Danny's parents are not very supportive of her job and believe she should have pursued a career as a teacher. They often make her and Danny feel guilty for not visiting or letting them watch Layne. Although Lori feels Danny's parents respect her more now that she is a mother, she nevertheless hopes to increase their distance from her in-laws by moving to Colorado in the next few years.

When asked what Lori hopes for herself and for her family in the future, she responded,

Financial stability, to be able to never have to balance a checkbook. Seriously. To be able to—when you need things—to go get them. Not to have to budget and to think of this and to think of that. To be able to have enough money saved to put my kids through school or through college. To be able to buy my dad an airplane.

Lori wants to have more children eventually, and she also plans to continue working and may consider taking Layne to daycare or preschool 2 days a week when he is older. No matter what she decides, however, Lori plans to continue to enjoy the best of both worlds, specifically working and mothering. She said,

I love being a mom. I wouldn't give it back for anything. I just think I'm really fortunate that I can spend the time that I'm able to spend with him and be home, and to be able to have a job where I can provide for my family, too.

Meredith

Meredith works part time as a loan technician and is the mother of Carson, age 2. She is also expecting a new baby soon. Prior to Carson's birth, Meredith worked full time in another position at the same company. After her maternity leave with Carson, she returned to work full time but felt exhausted. She said, "I did work full time for like 3 weeks when I went back to work [after having Carson] until I got the nerve up to say, 'OK, I'm going to work part time or quit.' I was pooped everyday." Unfortunately management was not cooperative with her desire to work part time, so Meredith quit her job.

A short time later she went to show off her new baby at her father's workplace in another department of the same company where she had worked. While she was there, somebody told her about a part-time position in another department, which Meredith now holds. She enjoys her job because it is convenient and taking this position allowed her to keep the benefits she had previously accrued while working full time for the same company. However, Meredith wishes she could have an information technology position because it would allow her to use her college degree.

Meredith enjoys having a part-time job. She said, "It's perfect for me because I'm not ready to stay at home.... It's a chance for me to get out." She continued, "I like the adult interaction the most probably; and the fact that I can get out of the house for a few days, but I'm still able to have 4 days where I'm having an influence on [my son]." Meredith feels that, unlike many mothers who are home every day of the week, she is happy to stay at home on her days off and does not look for

opportunities to “get out of the house” like many mothers do, such as to go grocery shopping, because she has ample opportunities to leave the house when she goes to work.

Meredith said she also works for financial reasons. She explained,

Well, originally I wouldn't have had to work, but the summer Carson was born we decided to go ahead and buy a minivan. We could have made it but we would have had to scrimp a little more, and neither Paul nor I felt like we wanted to be constantly asking ourselves if we could afford to go out to eat or buy something. So basically my paycheck covered my mom's babysitting and the van payment—and our little pleasure. We could go out to eat when we wanted to. It was important to us.

Recently Meredith and her husband purchased a new home, which makes Meredith's employment even more necessary. She stated, “Right now I do not have a choice about whether or not I work. I have to work right now.” Working also helps Meredith to stay up-to-date with new technology and provides her some financial security if anything happened to her husband. Meredith's current job also allows her to leave her work at work. She said, “Work isn't always the priority. I don't take it home. It's there. I go there, I do it. I come home, and don't think about it.”

Meredith feels that working part time also has some negative aspects. These include not using her college degree to its full potential, setting up her work schedule each week, and earning leave from work more slowly than she would with a full-time job. In addition, Meredith verbalized, “There's some times that I feel like I need to spend more time with [Carson] but I can't.” Meredith has also noticed that on the days she does not work she is more anxious for her husband to come home from work. She said, “I've noticed on days that I'm at home and my husband is late coming home, I'm more frustrated than on days I do work and he has to work late.” Overall, Meredith thinks most people, including her mother and several friends, are supportive of her decision to work part time. Others, such as her mother-in-law and other acquaintances, feel she should stay home full time and not let others “raise” her child.

Working part time rather than full time provides Meredith with the opportunity to teach her son the values she wants him to learn. She explained,

I would like him to develop a love for God, and, um, obedience to parents and people of authority, to show respect to them; to be a hard worker, have a good work ethic, and be a good friend to people.... You know, to treat people with dignity.

Meredith believes her Baptist religious values strongly influence her parenting practices. She also believes that children should be raised in the “love and admonition of God” as stated in the Bible.

On the 3 days that Meredith works each week, she leaves Carson with her mother. Meredith is extremely satisfied with her child care arrangements. She said, “It works out wonderful!” Meredith said she never thought about putting Carson in a regular daycare center. She explained, “If it wasn’t my mom, then it wasn’t going to be the right person to watch him.” Meredith enjoys having her mother watch Carson because she and her mother share the same discipline style. Meredith described,

The fact that he’s with my mom makes me not worried so much because I’ve given her permission to discipline. We have pretty much the same standards as far as what we’ll allow and what we won’t and when we’ll spank and when we don’t and that type of thing.

Meredith feels a major problem with most daycare centers is that they “can’t really enforce anything other than timeout.” causing many children to have behavior problems.

When Meredith is not working, she said she enjoys watching Carson learn and figure out new things. She also enjoys the hugs and kisses he gives her. She feels that two challenging aspects of motherhood are deciding how to discipline a 2-year-old who is becoming more independent and trying to ensure that Carson “has the right influences on his life at the right times.” Meredith feels she is a good mother because she tries to find an appropriate balance between discipline and fun and because Carson loves her. When asked what the ideal mother is like, Meredith replied,

I don’t know if anybody achieves their ideal mother. I think it’s always important to have goals to be better at whatever you’re doing. I think somebody who loves their kids and would do anything for them, but also loves them enough to discipline them, show them how to live, and have a Godly influence on their lives—somebody who your kids want to be like when they grow up.

Meredith’s role model is her own mother.

At times Meredith compares herself to other mothers and contrasts her son with other children. For example, Meredith has noticed that her sister-in-law has a slightly different parenting

style with her children than Meredith does with Carson, causing them to not always recognize that they should listen to adults other than their parents. In addition, Meredith said that at times she compares herself to some of her friends who were education majors in college and who seem to have more effective styles of disciplining or explaining things to their children. Meredith described how she sometimes watches her friends interacting with their children and thinks to herself, "Oh, I wish I could do that!" Meredith also recognizes, however, that all mothers are unique and that different situations yield distinct outcomes for different people. She explained, "My sister-in-law home-schools and I could never do that. I just don't have the patience for it. Obviously it works for her, but [it] would never work for me."

Meredith thinks that she and her husband, Paul, have a healthy marriage. She said Paul would enjoy staying at home with Carson, but he makes more money than Meredith so she has chosen to be the one to work part time. Meredith and Paul share household labor fairly equally. They both clean toilets, Meredith does the laundry, and Paul takes care of the lawn and does the grocery shopping. Meredith said Paul has never made her feel like she needs to do more housework because she is at home more than he is.

Meredith plans to continue working part time after her maternity leave is over. She hopes to never again work full time so she will have time to attend her children's activities at school. Meredith would like to enroll her children in a private Baptist school and would even increase her hours at work if the private school tuition became too expensive. In the long-term future, Meredith would enjoy doing what her mom does, that is, spending time with and helping to care for her grandchildren.

Patricia

Patricia is the mother of two children, Andrew, age 5, and Laura, age 3. When asked about the benefits of working part time, Patricia expressed, "It's nice because you kind of get the best of both worlds. You get to spend extra time with your kids and you still get to get out and have adult interaction." Prior to reducing her hours at work to part-time following the birth of her second child,

Laura, Patricia worked full time as a social worker. She found that working full time was not cost-effective because most of her income was going to pay for child care. Additionally, Patricia and her husband both wanted her to be with their children when they were little.

Instead of staying home full time, however, Patricia said she felt she needed some adult interaction. She explained,

I love my kids to death but if I had to be here 7 days a week with them 24 hours a day, I think I would go insane, and that's not doing them any good either. So [working] gives me a little respite, too, for me to get out of the house and do something else that I feel is productive.

Patricia chose to work part time to provide the break she needed because it would cover the cost of daycare unlike other activities, such as volunteering. She said,

I needed to get out of the house a little bit, and at least me working was bringing in some money.... Because I could have, you know, volunteered or done something like that, but I still would have had to find a babysitter for the kids, and at least working was a way to make it balance.

Patricia said that she, rather than her husband, opted to be at home with the children because her husband makes more money and he is less patient with the children.

Currently Patricia works 3 days a week as a social worker specializing with foster and adoptive placement children. Patricia enjoys her job for the most part even though the small income from her job only covers child care and maybe a few groceries. She said, "I guess it makes me feel like I'm having an impact on somebody else's life outside of ours, and hopefully a positive impact...." Patricia values the flexibility of being able to create her own work schedule.

Patricia thinks the greatest benefit of working part time rather than full time is having more time to spend with her children, Andrew and Laura. She said,

You get to see the important things that happen in your kids' lives. You know, them walking and making those huge milestones, and talking, and helping them through all of that. I think that the biggest benefit is just being with them and having them.

Patricia especially appreciates the opportunities she has to cuddle with her children. She said, “You have to cherish those [cuddle times] while you’ve got them. At some point they get too big to do that.”

Patricia’s said she feels her part-time job also has indirect benefits for Andrew and Laura because it gives them the opportunity to attend daycare. Patricia explained,

It’s a great way to do it, because you get the best of both worlds, and so do your kids, because they get to go to daycare and have the social interaction that helps them develop a lot of skills—sharing, and relationships, and all of that—and they still get to have alone and extra time with mom.

She added,

They gain the social interaction and learning how to work through their problems with their peers. You learn a lot of social skills being in that kind of environment and they wouldn’t get that if they were just here with me all day. So they learn a lot of social skills, and they’ve learned some educational stuff.

Changing to part time rather than full time also made Patricia’s life less stressful. She said, “Things got less stressful and more relaxed, and, um, calmer, more organized, even though you added an extra kid at that time.” Patricia sees her husband more often now that she works part time because he comes home for lunch and they all eat together as a family on her days off.

Patricia believes there are also some negatives associated with working part time. For example, the income she earns from working is almost entirely used to cover the cost of daycare, so her job provides no real financial gain for her family. Additionally, leaving Andrew and Laura at daycare can be stressful on the days they would rather stay at home. She said,

Sometimes they don’t want to go to daycare and that makes me sad because I still have to take them, and on those days it’s like, “OK, maybe I should just stay home because it’s not like we’re making any money.” So there’s the guilt, I guess, of still working part time when I don’t really have to.

Patricia is also extremely busy. She said she feels she has no real free time. She said, “Free time isn’t really free time when you’re a mom!” When her children are napping Patricia frequently works on projects, such as painting and sanding in their partially-remodeled bathroom. When asked what roles

she currently fills, Patricia said "Um, probably too many to count. I mean, housekeeper, plumber, contractor, maintenance man, groundskeeper, garbage man, I mean, the list is endless." Patricia enjoys reading and will frequently pick up a book and read a chapter even if she only has 10 minutes of time alone. Patricia also stays busy shuttling her children to separate daycares as well as picking Andrew up from half-day kindergarten. Patricia anticipates that life will get even busier once her children are more involved with school and extracurricular activities. Although she is busy, Patricia makes time to go out to dinner or a movie with girlfriends once a month.

Another challenge related to being home with her children more as a result of working part-time is that Patricia's children frequently cling to her and want her to help them with things rather than her husband, which can be frustrating for both Patricia and her husband. Patricia's job can also be extremely stressful at times, largely due to the extreme amounts of paperwork and bureaucracy she faces. She stated, "My job is pretty stressful, so sometimes there are times when I'm like, 'This isn't worth it.'" Patricia may one day work full time again, but she would enjoy having hours that allow her to pick her children up from school. She may also change jobs at some point. She explained, "I don't know if I'll still do what I'm doing now or not. Only time will tell. It's a stressful job...."

Patricia's said her top priority in life is to nurture her relationships with people, including, in order of importance, her family, her extended family, and her friends. Patricia explained, "If you're happy with your relationships, then everything else should fall into place." Patricia said working is not ranked very high on her list of priorities. However, she believes it is important to have a job she enjoys. She explained,

I could never do a job that I hated or that I was just going to [in order] to put food on the table. That would drive me insane, so I need to have some sort of work that I can at least enjoy....

One relationship at the top of Patricia's list of priorities is her relationship with her husband, Luke. Patricia and Luke have been married for 11 years. Patricia thinks she and Luke communicate well and she is glad he tries to help with housework. However, since the birth of their first child,

Patricia has noticed that the division of household labor between Luke and herself has become unbalanced. She stated,

We used to have assigned duties when it was just us, and that kind of fell to the wayside after we had Andrew. And we still sort of have assigned chores within the house. It's his job to vacuum and to mop, and it's his job to take the garbage out. It's his job to mow and do the weed-wacker, and then it's my job to basically do everything else. So it's not really balanced as much as it used to be.

Nurturing her relationships with her children is also important for Patricia. Patricia believes she is a good mother to Andrew and Laura. She explained, "I guess all you can do is the best that you can. I mean, and if you know that you've tried to do the best that you could each day, then you know that's the best that you can do." She continued, "I feel that I give them the freedom that they need, yet, um, the safety and the security that they need, too, to stay safe and comfortable." Patricia believes the ideal mother

...is just somebody who loves their kids for who they are and doesn't put added pressure on them to be something that they're not and provides them with the security that they need and the freedom that they need and are open to whatever.

When asked to describe her relationship with her children, Patricia said,

I think it's pretty good. They're pretty respectful, but then again, they're kids. Um, they listen most of the time. I choose my battles well. You know, if it's not going to cause injury or blood or anything like that, then maybe it's not worth fighting over. Um, I think they love me. I think they respect me. That's the most important thing.

Patricia sometimes faces a few challenges with her children. She explained,

You know, there [are] some nights, some days, that are really challenging, and then that's when you get your fingers out and you count, "How many years is it until they can stay home by themselves and we can go out and have a quiet dinner and not have to worry about paying for the babysitter and everything else?"

Every now and then Patricia said she struggles to remember that her children are small and to avoid expecting too much of them, as well as to remember that when she has a bad day at work she does not need to take it out on her children.

Patricia said that at times she compares herself to other mothers, such as when she is at the grocery store or at the park. She described,

You see parents at the grocery store or at the park or wherever you are and you see them do something and you're like, "Oh my word! I would never do that!" And then on the other side... when I see parents do things that I think are good, then I try and learn from those things and say, "Gosh, that's a good idea. Maybe I should try that."

Patricia said she feels that some of her friends who work full time are jealous of her opportunity to work part time, while others who stay home full time believe she should also stay at home full time. Patricia recognizes that while staying home full time might be nice for some people, like some of her relatives, she is happiest working part time.

Carol

Carol believes that working part time provides her with the perfect mix of social contact and time with her children, Bryant, age 2, and Jocelyn, 6 months. She said that working helps her to be a better mother, while being at home with her children part of the week makes her a better employee. She explained, "I think [working] helps [my children] because it keeps me stimulated and energized.... It makes me use my brain. And then when I am with them I appreciate it more." She continued, "And then, I guess, for work, I don't know if it is an advantage for that at all, except it keeps me fresh at my job. When I am there I like it." She concluded, "At work you rest from the home things and at home you rest from the work things."

Carol works part time as a pharmacist. She enjoys her job because her employer is flexible and personable and provides a family-friendly environment. She said, "Where I work now, they hired me knowing I wanted to work part time because I have a family, and they respect that and they encourage it." Prior to working part time, Carol worked full time for a large corporate pharmacy chain. She hated her job because it was inflexible and impersonal and she had little free time. She explained, "Well, we both worked full time. And just pretty much working is your main thing. I mean, working dictated your free time."

Carol said she has always wanted to work part time so she could have time to create a "cozy" home environment. She described,

I guess I was always looking forward to when I could cut back and just have more time to create a home. You know, to have more of a home life. Even if I didn't have kids, to cook some meals, to do things to make it cozy.

While Carol was pregnant with her first child, she had some difficulties with her health that encouraged her to begin working fewer hours, which she felt “was just a huge sense of relief.”

Carol's husband, Rob, also encouraged Carol to reduce her hours to part-time. Although Rob has often told Carol he would enjoy being a stay-at-home father, he was raised by a single mother who always wished she could stay home with her children, so Rob always wanted his wife to be able to do that. Carol is grateful that he has supported her decision to work part time. Carol feels that she and Rob have a great marriage and that they communicate and compromise well. Carol also seems mostly satisfied with the way she and Rob divide household tasks. She said,

I do the cooking, grocery shopping, cleaning up the dishes, you know, keeping the kitchen clean, and I do the vacuuming...and the dusting. And he does the bills, the financial planning, the outside, the yard work, and that kind of stuff, and he does most of the laundry.

Carol said that at times she resents that her husband fails to put his dishes in the dishwasher, but she does not press the issue at this point in time because she does not want to add more stress to their lives.

Carol believes her family and friends have positive opinions about her decision to work part time. She said, “I get a lot of support. Rob's family—they all think it's great. His parents are passed away, but his sisters wish they could stay home full time, so they're glad to see that somebody can stay home part time.” She continued, “And my family—my sister does the same thing I do, so my family is used to it and they think it's great.... I think they're happy for me, actually.” Many of Carol's friends also think her opportunity to work part time is nice. She concluded, “I think everyone thinks I'm lucky.”

Not only is working part time beneficial for Carol, but she believes her employment is also beneficial for her children, Bryant and Jocelyn. She said, “They'll realize that moms can work, too,

[that] moms have outside jobs and stuff.” Additionally her children gain cognitive and social skills while at daycare. She articulated,

We’ve seen [our son] really blossom since he has been going to the [daycare] center. He’s learning his ABCs and learning to count and...when he is around strangers he’s a lot more outgoing now.

Carol thinks her children also benefit on her days off because they can sleep in and not feel rushed to be ready to go to daycare.

Although there are a number of advantages linked to working part time. Carol said she also feels there are disadvantages. For example, Carol is bothered by the fact that her children cannot sleep in every day rather than just on her days off. She said,

Well, you know, it’s probably a little more stressful for them because we have to get them up early to get to the center. So they don’t get to sleep in everyday. They don’t probably get that freedom, like when you’re a child, you know, where there’s no stress at all and you just sleep in and play.

In addition, commuting 30 minutes from home to her children’s daycare and her work place can be challenging. She said, “When I work it’s a lot more stressful. It depends if I have to take the kids in.... If I have to be to work and take the kids in, that’s like the worst end of the opposite ends of the spectrum.” Driving with tired, hungry kids is difficult. Carol always hopes the daycare providers have remembered to feed Jocelyn right before she picks her up so they can make the commute home with as little crying as possible. Carol said she has become much more organized since she became a mother because she has to arrange snacks for her children to eat in the car during the drive, and she has to prepare all the equipment she needs to express breast milk for Jocelyn.

Carol said she misses her children when she is working and frequently feels guilty about leaving her children at daycare when they do not want to go. She also often feels torn between work and home obligations. She said,

You feel guilty for your kids because you’re leaving them and feel like you can never do enough, and then with work it’s like you’re not gung-ho, fully doing everything you could do at work, starting programs or really being a corporate ladder-climber type person. But that’s not my personality, so this suits me.

She added, "That's what you worry about: you can't do anything right, you know. perfect. You're not doing anything all the way. You're not a full-time mom and you're not a full-time worker."

Nevertheless, Carol concluded, "But, um, I think it works. For me, it works best this way."

Carol consciously chooses to avoid extra activities or work commitments so she will have more time with her children. Her priorities, in order of importance, are her children, herself, and her husband. She said,

Family is first, and if you don't take care of yourself, then you won't be able to take care of other people, so you have to keep your health and sense of well-being up. And then, you know, caring for my husband, helping make sure he's taking care of himself. But just the family; the kids first.

Putting her children first has had a direct impact on Carol's daily life. She said,

Our lives are very focused around the kids and really tuned into what would be good for them. That's why I cut back to part-time because we don't want to be too hectic all the time. I want that down time with the kids.

She added,

I always want to be able to sit down and spend time with Bryant and really give him my attention. I'll be feeling like I have to clean up the dishes and everything in the kitchen and he'll come in and want me to play with something, and I feel like I should always be able to sit down and play with him.

If her children are cooperative, Carol tries to run on her treadmill each morning because it puts her in a better mood and gives her more energy. Carol does not have a lot of free time. She watches her children on the weekend so her husband can catch up on paying bills or other things. However, every Tuesday her husband takes the kids to daycare early and Carol does not go to work until the afternoon, so she uses to morning to catch up on things around the house. She described the Tuesday arrangement as "a savior."

Carol enjoys being a mother. She explained,

I remember just the moment I knew I was pregnant. I just felt so different, somehow, about myself—just really happy that I had this baby to take care of and think about and just excited. I guess I just feel more worthwhile. I used to feel kind of empty a little bit, when it was just my husband and I, and now I just feel so much more worthwhile—fulfilled, I guess, is the word.

Carol believes a good mother is optimistic and cheerful and takes time to talk to and teach her children. She also said, "I don't think the ideal mom has to have a job outside the home. It's just whatever keeps them stimulated mentally and keeps them fresh and optimistic." Carol admires her own mother and her sister, and she often learns new ideas from watching other mothers.

Carol faces some challenges related to motherhood, including disciplining Bryant and trying to find new activities he enjoys, as well as appropriately balancing her attention between two children. At times Carol feels like she has not done all she could as a mother. She explained,

They never come out and say, "Mommy, thank you for spending the whole day with me. You've done really well," or "You've given me enough." You know, there's never that. So you just never feel like you can do enough. But I think they both love me, so that's all that matters.

Someday Carol would like to move to Ames so that she would no longer need to commute to work. She would also enjoy becoming more specialized at work and becoming more involved with extra programs, such as women's wellness workshops because it would be a worthwhile and rewarding way to help people.

Drea

"I wish all my friends could work part time," said Drea, who is the mother of a 3-year-old named Wade and who is also employed part time at a medical clinic. Drea loves working part time. She explained,

It's the best of both worlds.... I couldn't stay home full time because I'd go stir-crazy. I need to get out of the house. I need to go to work. I need to contribute to the bills.... But I don't want to be there [at work] all the time, 5 days a week, and having my babysitter raise my kid either.

She continued,

Every mother should be able to do it, because you get out of the house, you have your friends outside the home at work, so you get invited to functions that are work-related, which is good.... When you're home part time you have time to get your house cleaned up and your dentist appointments in, soccer and all that kind of stuff when it comes up.

Social contact is very important to Drea; she feels she needs to get out of the house regularly or she becomes irritable. She explained, "I love going to work.... It gets me out of the house so I won't get cranky. Sometimes when I have 4 days off in a row...I'm like, 'I am just so ready to leave and go to work and get out of here.'" Some of Drea's best friends are her co-workers. She said,

We have a blast! I love my job! I could go work somewhere else... and probably make 3 or 4 more dollars an hour... but I love everybody I work with. I just love them and I've become really close to them. So it's like I don't care if I'm only making piddly.

Drea believes that working part time has other benefits, as well. Drea believes that work provides her with mental stimulation. It also provides some extra income for their family, and it gives her more time with Wade and to do her favorite hobbies: crafts and interior decorating. Additionally, Drea believes Wade also benefits from her employment because he has the opportunity to learn social skills while at the babysitter's and to learn to be more independent. She explained, "[Wade] likes going to the babysitter.... They need to go play with different people and share and not hit.... It's good for him, too, or else he'd just be stuck to my leg." Drea thinks Wade's in-home care provider is wonderful, and she is glad she can pay her on an hourly basis, which she said she could not do if she took Wade to a daycare center or if she worked full time.

Although working part time is mainly a favorable experience, Drea also faces a few challenges. For example, she said she and her husband have a tight budget. Drea also gets no full-time employment benefits, such as sick pay or vacation. Like anyone who works, Drea dislikes some aspects of her job, and she has to be able to leave work to care for Wade when he is sick. Drea also does not necessarily like paying a babysitter, and she often feels she cannot leave Wade at night to do things with friends if she worked during the day. She said, "I feel guilty leaving him at night when I'm gone during the day sometimes."

Before working part time, Drea worked full time as a supervisor at a telecommunications company in Kansas City and was the major breadwinner for their family. When Wade was 4 months

old, Drea decided to reduce her hours to part-time because she missed her son. She was able to keep the same position by job-sharing with a co-worker. She explained,

It just kind of worked out for me at work. I found a girl that also wanted to go part time, so we went in together and presented our case. We job-shared.... So it just went in my favor and worked out very well.

She found that switching to part-time was not such a financial “blow” as one might think it would be because working fewer hours tended to save her money indirectly. She said,

It’s amazing. Say you cut your hours in half. Your pay doesn’t cut down because you’re saving money on this, that, and the other [by] not going to work, not going out to eat, not buying clothes, not having to drive, not having to pay your babysitter.

Drea and Dave also saved money by cutting back in other areas, such as by canceling their cable.

As Wade grew older, Drea and her husband decided they wanted to be closer to their family and friends in Iowa, so they decided to move back closer to home. Dave found a great job as a company site manager in Iowa, and Drea figured she “...could find a job doing whatever.” Drea worked at an insurance company for short time, and now she works at a medical clinic. She enjoys her current job because she is trained to cover nine different positions and works whenever people need days off. She can choose her days and hours, and her job duties are extremely varied. Drea also works selling kitchen products one evening a week mainly so she can get out of the house and earn some extra income. Drea said her employment does not provide a significant portion of their family income; her wages cover the car payment and groceries, for the most part.

Drea said that she, rather than Dave, chose to work part time because she wanted to spend more time with Wade and because she likes to cook and take care of the house. Additionally, she feels Dave would feel restless. She explained,

He’d go stir-crazy. That man cannot sit still for anything. It’s just his personality, you know, personalities. I like to be home and I like to cook and do all that and he doesn’t, so that’s just how it worked out basically.

Although Dave used to do the vacuuming and clean the bathrooms, Drea now does most of the household tasks. She said,

I'm the maid. I'm the cook. I'm the checkbook balancer. I'm the accountant. I'm the family runner of the business.... I'm the allowance-giver-outer for the husband. You know, the grocery-getter...the taxi.

Drea said that occasionally Dave will do the laundry, empty the dishwasher, or cook, and he is also in charge of the lawn and the vehicles. Drea said she does not mind doing most of the housework. She concluded, "Part of it's my fault because I don't ask.... He's just spoiled."

Drea feels that she and Dave have a good relationship. She said,

It's great! It's had its moments, but I've been married 5 ½ years and it's just gotten better. The older we get, it's gotten better. It's just, it's very fulfilling.... I'm very, very fortunate because I have a lot of people that have parts of it but they don't have it all, but I feel like I've got everything that you expect to get when you go into the whole deal.

Drea said she and Dave have fun together. They go out alone or with friends at least one or two nights a month and get a babysitter for Wade. They also respect each other's space. Drea said, "We let each other do our thing. There's no jealousy or any of that." Drea also enjoys going out to eat with friends or doing Pampered Chef shows while Dave watches Wade.

Drea's most important priority in life is God, followed in order by being a mother, a wife, a sister, a daughter, and a friend. Motherhood is central to Drea because she wants to ensure that Wade feels loved. Although she believes that everyone has a different concept of an ideal mother, Drea personally think a good mother is "very loving and express[es] that love so they know that you love them." She continued, "[Wade] knows I love him, so then I think I've done a good job." In addition to loving Wade, Drea said she feels she is a good mother because Wade is well-behaved for the most part and people enjoy being around him. She hopes that in the future she will always be an understanding mother so Wade will be able to communicating openly with her.

Drea appreciates the opportunity to spend extra time with Wade on her days off. She said,

He is a crack-up. Some of the stuff they come up with just amazes you. Or, you know, you'll just be watching them play and you just think, "How can he do that?"... Sometimes it just strikes you. But he loves to really do anything that we will sit down and do with him.

At times, however, Wade's behavior can be challenging. She explained,

He has no patience. He is at that age anyway that everything is a challenge as far as I'm concerned. Three is not my favorite age so far.... You know, I'll be talking to somebody on the phone and if he wants you, he wants you right then. He'll just go, "Mom, Mom, Mom, Mom," until he just about drives you crazy. He's in that testing us stage.

Drea also believes that motherhood is a time-consuming job that does not really end; however, she loves Wade very much and believes he knows he is loved.

Most of Drea's friends and family have a positive view of part-time employment. Like Drea, her sisters work part time, which their mother is happy about because all her grandchildren get to be at home with their mothers some of the time and are not always with a babysitter. Unfortunately, however, Drea said some of her former friends have become somewhat jealous of her opportunity to work part time; she found it interesting to see which friends stopped calling and going to lunch with her after she began working part time.

In the future Drea hopes that her life will basically stay the same while also continuously improving. She said, "I just want things to just kind of stay the same and just get better." Drea hopes her husband will always have a good job, that they will remain healthy, and that they will never have to move again. Drea expects Wade will become more involved in activities. She said, "Wade is going to get busier and busier, so I'm just going to be more Mom, more Mom." Drea hopes to continue to be available for Wade when he is in school. She explained,

I want to be able to—they have classroom moms that help. I want to do all that kind of stuff. Wear all the geeky buttons [from] all his sports stuff. That's my goal, I guess. I want to be a cool mom.

In the more distant future Drea would like to be able to fix up their house, travel with her husband, and be able to pay for Wade's college expenses and send him money when he needs it. She concluded that she would like to "just be happy, be able to help [Wade] and do some things for him that our parents weren't able to do for us."

CHAPTER 5. COMPOSITE DESCRIPTION OF THE PHENOMENON OF FULL-TIME STAY-AT-HOME MOTHERING

In this chapter I provide a composite description of the lived experience of full-time stay-at-home mothering. This narrative report, which is the last step of Moustakas' (1994) five steps of phenomenological data analysis, includes a discussion of the major themes and sub-themes discussed by the full-time stay-at-home mothers and should enable the reader to begin to comprehend the phenomenon of full-time stay-at-home mothering. Table 3 lists each of these themes and sub-themes.

Table 3. Themes and sub-themes outlining the phenomenon of full-time stay-at-home mothering

Theme 1. Reasons for Being a Full-Time Stay-At-Home Mother
Top Priority is the Family and Mothering
Combining Mothering and Working Can Be Stressful and Exhausting
Financial Evaluation/Working and Daycare Can Be Expensive
Theme 2. Perceived Positives of Full-Time Stay-At-Home Mothering
Rewards of Mothering: Love, Fun, and Play
Moms Believe They Provide Greater Love and Attention Than Daycare Providers
Opportunity to Teach Personal Values to Children
Greater Flexibility and Spontaneity
Reduced Stress
Theme 3. Perceived Challenges of Full-Time Stay-At-Home Mothering
Difficult and Tedious Job
Children's Misbehavior and Fussiness
Negative Comments From Others About the Stay-At-Home Mother Role
Isolation and Lack of Connection
Children Miss the Social Benefits of Daycare
Lower Household Income
Theme 4. Social Contact and "Me-Time"
"Taking Care of Myself"
"Getting Out" and Interacting With Adults
Support Network With Other Mothers
Theme 5. "Good" Mothering
The Ideal Mother
Admiration for Role Models
Personal Evaluation of Self and Child
Theme 6: The Marriage Relationship and Division of Household Labor/Child Rearing
The Marriage Relationship
Why Moms—Not Dads—Stay at Home Full Time: Moms Feel Better Equipped
Division of Household Labor and Child Rearing Responsibilities
Theme 7. Future Desires and Plans

Theme 1. Reasons for Being a Full-Time Stay-At-Home Mother

Prior to staying at home full time with their children, each of the seven full-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed either worked ($n = 5$) or were full-time students ($n = 2$). Four had one or two children who were cared for by child care providers either in or outside the home, and one mother did most of her work from home and struggled to watch her children at the same time. Two informants decided to be full-time stay-at-home mothers concurrent with or even prior to the birth of their first child and therefore did not simultaneously experience employment and mothering.

Although their experiences before staying at home full time were various, the reasons these mothers chose to stay at home were similar and can be divided into three sub-themes. First, all the mothers listed motherhood or family as either their highest priority or second only to their faith in God. The importance these mothers placed on their children and families was a strong influence on their decision to be stay-at-home mothers. Second, for those that worked prior to staying at home, combining working and mothering resulted in feelings of stress and exhaustion. Finally, most of the full-time stay-at-home mothers analyzed their family's financial situation and felt that after the cost of daycare or added taxes associated with being a two-income family, staying at home would be less expensive, or at least would not result in a significant reduction in expendable income. Quotations from each of the full-time stay-at-home mothers, along with my interpretations of their comments, help to paint a clear picture of why many full-time stay-at-home mothers make the decision to be with their children full time rather than to work.

Top Priority is the Family and Mothering

Each of the full-time stay-at-home mothers consider their children or their family to be one of their highest priorities and mothering their children to be one of their most important roles in life.

Comments included:

I...wanted to share with you a quote from Jackie Kennedy Onassis: "If you bungle raising your children, I don't think whatever else you do well matters very much." I think that is why most of those of us who decide to dedicate a season of our lives to raising our children do it.

My children are my most significant and lasting contribution to the world. I want to do my best for them. (Kalleen)

Right now the priority is the family. Um, least important would be money and everything else in the middle between there. My husband and I try to base most of our decisions on what's good for the family.... Right now with small children that definitely comes first. (Deborah)

I would say being a mother is first. That's my job. I guess I put my job first, which is being a mother and a wife first. (Adrianna)

Right now [my] most important [priority] is my son. My husband probably comes second, which he knows it now, which I'm sure was hard for him to take in the beginning because he was used to being the focus of my attention. And then probably myself next, and then probably other family and friends. (Cassie)

The most important thing would probably be my relationship to God. Second is my family. Boy, and after that, my friends. And things after that drop dramatically in importance. (Kalleen)

The kids are definitely the highest thing and pretty much anything after that is secondary. It's not necessarily a priority after that. (Sally)

One mother said she felt that by making her faith and ethics her top priority, the other priorities in her life, such as being a mother and family member, seemed to "fall into place." She said,

I think, um, above everything [my top priority] would be something regarding ethics and religion. I think my first priority is to be good, to make right choices, to feel guilt-free because I've done the right thing, to learn more about Jesus, you know. Because those things are very, very important to me and I think I'm encouraged to keep putting that first by the fact that when I do the other priorities in my life, like my family, being a good mom, being a good daughter, sister, friend, they seem to even out and fall into place, into a reasonable perspective when I try to be a good person first.... (Anne)

For some full-time stay-at-home mothers, mothering was a priority long before they ever had children. One mother explained,

I was always kind of hoping [to be able to stay at home]. My mom stayed at home until we were older, in school and stuff. That's always kind of been my philosophy. If they didn't have to go to daycare, then that's what I wanted to do. (Amber)

Finally, for others, being a full-time mother became a priority after they had children.

Your priorities change [when you have kids] because you want to be around. You don't want to necessarily have somebody else raising your kid. (Deborah)

I never had aspirations of being a mother. I wanted to be kind of a corporate girl. Or I wanted to write books and do things. I always thought I'd have a family, but I never imagined I'd be

a homemaker. I'm not that type, or I wasn't when I was growing up. But when I got to this stage and I had a child... it felt like the right thing to do. Once I had her I felt this huge responsibility for her, and I wanted her taken care of and I wanted it done right and only I knew what I thought right was, so I had to do it. (Anne)

I did the thing that I really wanted to do, basically. That was being a mom. I had my daughter. We planned her. We had her. I felt I wasn't putting her first [while I was working], or putting her where she should be. So I put her there. (Adrianna)

Combining Mothering and Working Can Be Stressful and Exhausting

Another reason several mothers chose to stay at home with their children is the sense of stress and exhaustion they experienced while working prior to staying at home. Many phrases describe the tension and fatigue that resulted from performing both mothering and working roles, including "weighing on you," "running around," and "balancing act."

I was a lot more tired [when I worked]. It's not that I get a lot more sleep at night than I did before, but I think there's an added stress, because when you're a mom plus full time at another job you're working two jobs. Potentially you've got the stresses from both of them weighing on you. If you can just cut down to one job, you kind of eliminate some of that stress. (Kalleen)

I was always working and then we'd come home at night and we were both exhausted. So basically it was just catch up on the weekends and just running around straightening everything and I never got to live in my home it felt like. I was always leaving it and dropping her off. (Adrianna)

With every day that I stayed home with Samantha, I had to do the balancing act on her needs, my needs, the needs of the house, the needs of my husband—doing things for him. I think I've been able to prioritize a little better [now that I stay at home full time]. It's not so much rush, rush, rush on the weekends and then go back to work and then have to pile everything into 2 days again. (Adrianna)

Some mothers also said they felt they were only able to perform their combined mothering and working roles "halfway" or "half and half."

...for most women, especially women my age—I'm 35—they were raised to believe you can have it all, and yet you should do your best at everything, all at once, and that's just impossible. You cannot give 100% to everything. It's impossible to do that. So you have to prioritize and sometimes I think that's why I left my job is because I wasn't the kind of person who wanted to be at work and do things halfway and then be at home and then not have enough to give my child. (Adrianna)

And I sometimes thought it would be easier if I just worked full time or didn't work at all because trying to do half-and-half sometimes got in the way. Because I was doing half of my

job at work and then half of my job as a mom, and I didn't ever feel like I was getting to do both very well. (Amber)

Not only did many of the full-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed find balancing their work and mothering roles difficult, but they faced other stressors, included commuting, leaving work to care for sick children, and dropping children off at daycare. The following statements illustrate the strain they faced as a result of these experiences.

We were both exhausted [when I worked]. Physically it was tough, so that was a big thing. Emotionally, the being torn whenever she was sick. I was the parent who had to come all the way home. Sometimes my husband could do it, but usually not. (Adrianna)

When I worked part time... and [my son] went to daycare, the daycare situation was stressful because he didn't like going, so that was an issue. (Amber)

I just didn't have the stamina to do my daily commute, which was in Des Moines, so it was an hour commute each way on a good day.... Basically I was away from home... 12 hours. (Adrianna)

Financial Evaluation/Working and Daycare Can Be Expensive

The third major reason these mothers chose to stay at home with their children full time was because of an evaluation of their financial circumstances and a consideration of the expenses of working and daycare. Many mothers felt happy that a combination of their financial circumstances and their financial sacrifices allowed them to stay at home. One mother said,

It certainly helps that Steve has a job that allows [me to stay at home]. Being financially stable and making sacrifices to do this—it's definitely something that we're able to do and lucky enough to do, and not everybody is able to do that. (Sally)

Another concluded that staying at home full time did not require a large income from the working spouse. She explained,

Some people say, "Oh financially we've got to do this," and I'm here to tell you, you know, we don't make a lot of money, but we still have a very decent house and we can provide what she needs. You don't need a lot of money to stay at home. (Adrianna)

One mother began staying at home full time just after her husband got a new job with a much higher salary. She said,

When we had our first child we talked about it and I was working full time before having him. Financially we just thought, "Well, we probably needed some income," so I cut back to 3 days a week and did that. Then when we had the second one, my husband also got a new job, so the financial aspect of it was better than what it was previously, so that kind of was a factor.... (Amber)

Finally, several mothers said they felt that working and child care were quite expensive, thus making staying at home a financially feasible alternative that did not dramatically reduce their household disposable income. Comments included the following:

When we figured out how much I was making versus what we were paying for daycare and the taxes on top of that, strangely enough I thought it would be more difficult financially and actually making less also lowered our tax bill, also lowered a lot of other things. So we're doing a lot better.... (Adrianna)

One in daycare was manageable; two in daycare would have been really expensive.... (Amber)

And I don't think daycare is a bad thing, but economically the more kids you have the less realistic it is [to work] because you have to have a great job to be able to afford to have all those kids in daycare. (Deborah)

I decided that I would stay home when my younger son, Jacob, was born. Because at that point in time, what we would have to pay somebody for the type of care we wanted would be—I'd be pulling in less than \$100 a week anyway, so I may as well take care of the kids myself. I wanted to do that anyway. (Kalleen)

I didn't have anyone to watch the kids, and I was [working] while the kids were here and I realized I was trading their time for a couple hundred dollars and it felt wrong. It just felt wrong to me.... So the next time I had the opportunity [to work] I said no, that I wasn't going to do it anymore, because we couldn't pay somebody and keep enough money to make it worth it. (Anne)

Theme 2. Perceived Positives of Full-Time Stay-At-Home Mothering

Staying at home full time to be with children is quite rewarding for the mothers I interviewed. Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of being at home is the unconditional love and the fun and humor these mothers share with their children. Additionally, these mothers believe they provide greater love and attention for their children than would daycare providers, and they enjoy the increased number of opportunities they have to teach their personal values to their children. The full-time stay-at-home

mothers I interviewed also reported experiencing greater flexibility and spontaneity, as well as reduced stress, since staying at home full time.

Rewards of Mothering: Love, Fun, and Play

Perhaps the most striking thing I noticed about the full-time stay-at-home mothers is that they truly love and appreciate their role as stay-at-home moms, illustrated by the following comments:

I think it's the best job. And I guess I really don't know what I could be doing with my life otherwise right now that would be more rewarding, that would mean more to me. (Kalleen)

I love it! I've done other kinds of work before this as far as studies, but I don't think it's been quite as much fun [as being a stay-at-home mother]. (Sally)

It's wonderful. I think, for me, I know my daughter a lot better than I would have if I hadn't decided to stop working at my full-time job. (Adrianna)

Many mothers particularly enjoy being the recipient of the unconditional love provided by their children, which is largely evidenced through the hugs and kisses, the "I love you's," or the art projects or other gifts they consistently receive from their children.

[The kids'] love is unconditional and they don't care what I do. Even if they get in trouble and if I get mad at them, 5 minutes later they've forgotten about it and everything's OK whereas an adult would carry a grudge for a while longer. They don't care. They're forgiving. (Amber)

You know, she's always running up and giving you hugs or she's saying, "I love you, Mommy!" (Sally)

The hugs and kisses and just being there—that's rewarding. Just, you know, having them. (Amber)

Then the external rewards are things that come from my children to me, like those flowers over there—Malinna made them today. Things like that, when she tells me that she loves me and appreciates me. (Anne)

Many of these mothers said their children often do "funny" or "hilarious" things which make being with their children throughout the day very worthwhile:

Well, I mean, there's always those little moments where they imitate you and they always come up with something. And it just makes you laugh and it's the funniest thing. Then you have to email it to everybody really quick before you forget it. (Sally)

Just the names [my son] comes up with for things are just hysterical. He called lightning bugs "Blinkin'-butt bugs." (Kalleen)

...two and a half years old is, I think, a fun age. A lot of people say "the terrible twos" and he has his moments, believe me, but he just cracks me up. It's just pretty funny. (Amber)

I see funny things with her every day. She teases a lot. She makes jokes, even with a limited vocabulary, which is funny. (Adrianna)

Boy, I love my kids! They're kind of young yet, so they talk to me about this and that. The 2-year-old is just so funny because he's coming up with things all the time, developing imagination. He told me yesterday he was picking clips off the ceiling and putting them on the couch so they couldn't make that clicking noise anymore. And I don't have any idea where he got that, but he would stand with both hands outstretched and jump and grab the ceiling. "I'm getting the clips! I'm getting the clips!" and he'd run over and put them on the couch.... It's really fun to see things the way he sees them. (Kalleen)

Witnessing the growth and development of their children, including "firsts" such as rolling or sitting up, is another reward many full-time stay-at-home mothers described.

I would say it's wonderful to see your child go through the so many changes that they experience in such a short frame of time. I love that. I feel lucky that I get to do that. (Cassie)

I really enjoy being there when my kids do fun things. You know, and all the firsts like rolling over and first words and all that kind of stuff. I'm excited about that. (Amber)

Sometimes you're just all excited because it's "Oh, she had a big old poop and it went up the back of her shirt" or whatever.... Or, "She got her first tooth!" (Sally)

[One of the most rewarding things is] just knowing that I'm taking care of the house and family and putting dinner on the table. It's just so "June Cleaver," but it's kind of rewarding just accomplishing the mundane tasks—fixing dinner and watching your children grow up. Julia points to something and says, "E!" or "Backwards!" Her speech is getting better. Just seeing stuff like that everyday is kind of fun. (Deborah)

Finally, some mothers also expressed that spending the majority of their time with their children helped them to "slow down" and appreciate life from a more childlike, playful perspective.

[Being a stay-at-home mom] really does make you slow down. And you get in touch with your own childhood. You slow down and marvel at the little things in life: "Look at that potato bug! Look what happens when you touch it!" and it rolls up into a ball or something. And going to the zoo. Just little things. They just think, "It's so cool, Mom, learning about all this stuff!" (Sally)

I love going to the park! We just have so much fun there. (Sally)

She teaches me to laugh and to stop and look at things. And I'm re-learning things because of her, too. I can't remember the last time I played with glue and glitter. And I did that the other day and it was a lot of fun just seeing how she figures all this stuff out. She teaches me to be creative, which is something I didn't think I was capable of after being in the work force for so long, you know? (Adrianna)

Moms Believe They Provide Greater Love and Attention Than Daycare Providers

Several mothers said they believe that most daycare providers do not give children, especially infants, as much attention as they would receive at home from their mothers.

But [one things they gain from being at home is] the individual attention that they get, especially Zachary being an infant. The infant rooms at the daycares. I just think they're in the swing all day or they're not held as much. That may not be true, but just the nurturing from being with their mom, and security and all that kind of stuff. (Amber)

I think if [the kids] were with someone who's watching a lot of kids, it would be harder on that person because you can't give as much attention to a particular child. Especially my second one is a really, really mellow baby. He would play by himself happily all day if nobody interacted with him. I think that would probably happen to him in a larger daycare setting.... (Kalleen)

Many of these mothers also believe that they provide greater love and security for their children than would be possible at daycare:

But I just think the parents love their kids and are even sacrificially devoted to them. Whereas I don't think any other caregiver, except maybe grandparents, would be quite that devoted to your kids and their well-being and wanting everything to be just right for them.... I don't mean to suggest that care providers don't give attention to kids. Of course they do. If they didn't care about kids, they wouldn't be in that line of work. But it is "work." It's their job. A parent is, as I said, sacrificially devoted to *this* child among all other children. Many care providers genuinely care for the kids in their charge, but love and devotion are something more. (Kalleen)

I think she gets a much greater sense of security and independence [from being with me rather than in daycare].... She and I are so close, almost, that we kind of take each other for granted. But when we're not there, it's a big hole. And I know—I think she's a much more confident little girl now that she knows her mom is always at home or one parent is always there. (Adrianna)

[Daycare can't compare to a parent being home because of] the love and support, I guess. I mean, no matter how caring the daycare providers are, they're not the same. (Deborah)

I don't think [my children] would appreciate the simple things in life as much or how special, unique, valuable, and capable they are [if they were in daycare]. Being with them affirms how important they are to me and Steve and that is something they will always have. (Sally)

In short, these mothers firmly believe they as mothers provide their children with greater love, support, and attention than any child care provider would or could, and that this motherly love will help their children feel more secure and valuable now and in the future.

Opportunity to Teach Personal Values to Children

Most of the full-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed believed that staying at home provided them with an invaluable opportunity to impart their personal values or ethics to their children. Phrases such as “the right way,” “how things should be done,” “control what she’s learning,” and “molding him,” communicate the strong sense of values each of these mothers brings to their daily interactions with their children, as shown in the following passages:

I just really never wanted anybody else watching my kids.... I want them to learn things—not necessarily being influenced by media, not necessarily being influenced by other kids who are in group care and who aren’t getting the attention they need and deserve. I just want them raised *my* way—the *right* way! (Sally)

I know that there are people who want to work and that’s good for them, but for me it’s so important to be able to be the one who’s guiding him and telling him, you know, how things should be done. (Cassie)

There are a lot of good daycares out there. There’s nothing wrong with that. I just feel like—Mark and I talked about this—but we kind of have the philosophy that if our kids are going to be screwed up, we want to be the one responsible for doing it. We want to be the ones to teach them things and instill their values and all that kind of stuff and not have them be away from us for 10 hours a day. I mean, we have them, they’re our responsibility to raise however they turn out. (Amber)

I get to see what she’s learning and how she’s learning it and control what she’s learning as well. (Adrianna)

I feel like I’m the one molding him into who he’s going to become later on rather than sending him to daycare. (Cassie)

In the following passages, two mothers suggest that staying at home with their children provides the most effective means of transmitting their sense of morals and ethics to the next generation. The first specifically believes this occurs because as a stay-at-home mother she can immediately teach her children when they are open to learning something; the second describes how

her presence in the home gives her children a significant amount of time in which they can observe her living a moral lifestyle. They said,

I am the person they spend the most time with, so I have the opportunity to communicate my values to them whenever issues may come up. Right now they may be as simple as "Do you know why it is naughty to push down Jacob and take his toy?" But as they grow, situations will become more complex. If they spent the majority of their waking hours with someone else, I could not be sure that any advantage was being taken of moments they are open to values being imparted, or how closely those values they were learning mirrored mine. (Kalleen)

I think they gain a great deal by being with their biological parent if the parent is an adequate parent.... And the first thing they gain is ethics and morals, like a basis for their decisions throughout their life, I think. If they're at home with Mom, say—it could be Dad, it doesn't matter which—but if they're at home with them all day long they'll see and observe—and they're very good at observing—how I make decisions and why. And if I am behaving in a certain way they'll start picking that up and I think that's very important. I think that if there isn't a central place where children learn what's right and what's wrong, what's kind and what's unkind, I don't think you can consciously teach it. You have to get it by observing people long-term. (Anne)

Greater Flexibility and Spontaneity

Several of the mothers mentioned enjoying a more flexible and spontaneous schedule as a result of staying at home full time. They appreciate being able to schedule different things, such as cleaning, playing with the kids, and even occasionally napping, at any time that is convenient for them and their children. Two mothers explained,

I pick my own hours [as a stay-at-home mom]. I like that. Not that I can choose when they're sick or when they're teething or whatever, but I can choose when I make appointments and I don't have a lot of time, but I don't have a lot of time that's really certainly scheduled. So I like that. I like the freedom of that. There's no other job that lets you do that, either, that lets you decide when you're going to mop the floor and when you're going to take a walk to the park. (Anne)

[Now that I'm a stay-at-home mom] I get to take naps sometimes. That's really nice. (Kalleen)

Melissa particularly enjoys the opportunity to spontaneously do fun things with her children, such as go swimming or to the park. In the following passage she describes the inflexibility her brother and sister-in-law experienced when they both worked, which prevented them from doing things with their children at "the spur of the moment." She said,

I know [my brother and sister-in-law] always found it a little bit more hectic, more frantic, and didn't necessarily have time to sit and play with the kids and go to the park and do things. [If you work] you can't take them swimming. You can't take them to the park for a picnic. You can't go sledding at the spur of the moment. You can't say all the sudden, "The snow's perfect! Let's go!" (Melissa)

Finally, two mothers also described having a closer relationship with their extended families since they began staying at home full time because they had the flexibility to spend time with them not only on the weekends, but during the week as well. They said,

I know that [my husband's] parents value the fact that I stay home so they're really happy about that and they like the fact they can call during the day and talk to the kids or come visit on Thursday or, you know, not have to be on the weekend. (Deborah)

My family, I'd probably say we were close before [I began staying at home], but maybe have become a little bit closer, too, because I have the flexibility to pick up when I want to and go visit.... I've taken the boys a couple of times just during the week, for a couple days taken them up there and gotten to stay [at] Grandpa's and Grandma's. (Amber)

Reduced Stress

Another perceived positive which most full-time stay-at-home mothers mentioned is a reduction in stress that occurred when they began staying home with their children. Not only do these mothers say they themselves feel more relaxed, but they believe their children and husbands feel calmer, as well. The following passages portray the increased patience and relaxation many mothers reported experiencing since they began staying at home:

I think I am more relaxed, patient, and tolerant [now that I stay at home]. I am more content to just be than to always have to be doing something. (Amber)

Now [that I stay at home] I feel a lot better. I'm just a lot less stressed. (Adrianna)

I'm much more relaxed, and my husband has noticed that—that I'm much more relaxed and more cheerful and more patient than I was [when I worked]. (Kalleen)

The job that I had was very stressful. I mean, I was always waking up in the middle of the night and my thoughts were racing and thinking about this tax deadline or that thing I had to do—a memo to write, or.... And staying home is a lot less stressful, because you wake up in the middle of the night and you're thinking about lullabies and "Bob the Builder's" theme song is going through your head. I mean, it's just totally different. (Deborah)

One mother said she also felt that by not working she could enjoy spending time with her husband and son in the evening rather than have to worry about paying bills or other household tasks. She said,

When my husband comes home [the three of us] can play together, have dinner, then when Brock goes to sleep it can be our time. Or it can be alone time, whichever we prefer. But if we want to spend time together, I mean, we have that time available. I'm not coming home from work all day, coming to focus on the house and paying the bills and different things like that. It's already been taken care of before he gets home. (Cassie)

Staying at home also reduces these mothers' stress because they no longer have to get up early and rush to be ready to take their children to daycare each morning. One mother said,

Um, I think the kids are happier [now that I stay at home] because you don't have to get up, get them out the door, get them to daycare at 7:30 in the morning so you can get to work by 8:00. On a lot of levels it's more relaxed. You can spend more time. You're more flexible about things. So that's all invaluable, I think. I think a lot of people are just running around—and I was doing the same thing—just spreading themselves way too thin. (Deborah)

Two mothers also believe staying at home decreases the stress in their husbands' lives, as well.

It's nice to have me home because my husband—I don't know how to say this without sounding stereotypical—but he doesn't have to do as much around the house as he did when we were both working. That just makes it easier for him. With his new job he's gone more. He works later hours and stuff so it's just nice not having that added stress. (Amber)

Ever since I thought about having children or have been with my husband, I always told him that I wanted, when we had children, to be able to stay at home and he agreed. And his mindset on the whole thing is when you have two parents that work, neither one of them can give full attention to their job and neither one of them can give full attention to their family. So his thinking, and why he agreed that I should stay at home: he can give his whole attention to work. He doesn't have to worry about—he knows things are taken care of at home. If Brock's sick he doesn't have to worry about, "Oh, do I have to take off this time to watch Brock, or is Cassie going to do it?" You know, he knows things are taken care of at home. (Cassie)

Clearly the full-time stay-at-home mothers believe many aspects of stay-at-home mothering make their roles worthwhile and rewarding.

Theme 3. Perceived Challenges of Full-Time Stay-At-Home Mothering

Although the full-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed described several positives they believe accompany their role as stay-at-home mothers, they also talked about many perceived challenges of staying home full time. These include the overall difficulty and tedium of staying at

home, dealing with their children's misbehavior and fussiness, receiving negative messages about the worth of their role from society, feeling isolated and lacking connection to the world outside of caring for the home and children, the loss of social interaction their children experience by not attending daycare, and having a lower household income. These sub-themes are discussed as follows.

Difficult and Tedious Job

All of the full-time stay-at-home mothers described some aspect of their daily routine with children and household tasks that is exhausting, difficult, monotonous, or repetitive. The ensuing statements are some general descriptions of the difficulty of the "job" of being a stay-at-home mother.

There's no other job in the world that is so challenging that you feel inadequate regularly, but you love it. (Anne)

I think [being a stay-at-home mom is] a very under-rated job. And I know people talk about it all the time, but it is....I knew it was going to be hard, but I didn't know how hard it was going to be. And yes, it's a lot of fun and yes, I get to do a lot of neat things that I wouldn't get to do if I was working, but there's a stress of just being with them. (Amber)

I made the mistake actually at a holiday party someone said, "What do you do?" And I said, "I'm just a stay-at-home mom." And they looked at me and said, "*Just* a stay-at-home mom? That's a full-time job! You need to stop saying that!" So that kind of ... made me think, so yeah, I *do* do a lot all day. So now I say I'm a stay-at-home mom. I don't say the "just" part. I say, "I'm a stay-at-home mom," and I think that kind of explains a lot there, at least people who know what it's like to take care of a child and know how much work it is. (Cassie)

There is no other job where you're challenged everyday like being a mom. There is no other job like it. Like, there are jobs that you could have, that they would be hard and you would have to learn new things everyday, but there's no other job where you have the potential for feeling like a complete idiot everyday because there's no manual. There's no instruction booklet for each child and they're all different, so even if you had one, it doesn't mean that the next one is going to be the same. (Anne)

[Being a stay-at-home mom is] harder than I ever imagined it would be. It's a lot of hard work. I'm exhausted at the end of the day. (Amber)

Much of the difficulty and exhaustion these mothers described is related to the large number of household tasks they perform each day, including changing diapers, doing dishes and laundry, cleaning, and picking up toys. In the following passages several mothers describe some of the tedious, repetitive tasks they perform day in and day out.

[One challenge is] the, "I'm so sick of another sinkful of dirty bottles." There's kind of a tedium involved in small child care. There's diapers, there's bottles, there's hardly any downtime. (Kalleen)

I remember the first couple of weeks when Zachary was really tiny. My husband came home one day and I said, "I changed 14 diapers today!" And he's like, "No way!" "Yeah, I did." I'm like, "I never imagined I would ever change 14 diapers in a day." It happened. (Amber)

I just kind of get tired of the routine sometimes. You pick up, clean up. It's just little moments of, "Oh, I have to do this again," on a daily basis. I don't really have big moments of, "I'm so bored. I don't have anything to do," because that's definitely not the case. [It's] more like the tediousness of doing the same thing, like cleaning up the bibs and putting away the cups and that sort of thing. (Adrianna)

There's always something to be done: a toilet to be scrubbed, a floor to be wiped down.... (Cassie)

If I'm home all day and the kids are there all day, they're there to mess it up all day. And it takes them about two minutes to drag out everything in the house and have it strewn all over the floor. And I have to decide, "Well, do I want to pick it up 500 times or do I just want to let it set for a while and pick it all up at the end of the day?" (Kalleen)

Not only are the endless household tasks difficult for these mothers, but even simply caring for children can be challenging at times because it requires great effort, energy, thought, and time.

Several mothers explained,

[Staying at home is] very, just day-to-day tasks. Unless you've taken care of a small child before, you probably don't have a lot of understanding of just the—like it takes a lot of time and energy. Like, "Oh, just watching kids." But there's a little more than that, especially if you—You want to be teaching them and engaging their little minds and helping them understand things so it's more than just, "Here, you go play with that. I'm going to go over here." You want to make sure they're not hurting each other...and spend time with them—not just being their custodian but interacting with them. (Kalleen)

[Staying at home full time is] a little different than babysitting. I have a friend who, before she became a mother, had said, "You know, I've worked in daycare. I could take care of babies no problem." Then once she was responsible for one 24-7, she said, "Oh my goodness. This is so different. I can't go home and get a full night's sleep." (Kalleen)

The other negative is that it's 24 hours a day and, you know, if your kid's—James used to stay up until 11:00 at night and we never got a break.... And you can't just let your spouse take care of them on the weekends because they're like, "When do I get a break?" (Deborah)

Finally, simply balancing housework and child rearing can be difficult, particularly when a child is demanding attention just as a specific household task needs to be accomplished, as Cassie describes:

He will play by himself, but he still kind of demands that attention every once in a while. So what I find I can do is when he's playing nicely by himself I try and get things done around the house, or I'll have him follow me around. And then when he really needs that one-on-one time, then I'll just sit down. If I sit down and give him 20 minutes, play or wrestle with him or something, or whatever it is, as long as I give him that time, then I find he's OK for a little while longer. Then I can go on and do some more things without him. (Cassie)

I think that's my most challenging time of day is trying to get dinner done, because breakfast is easy. It's usually a banana or something he can pop in his mouth, and lunch is the same way. [For] dinner I'm usually cooking, preparing something, and so I have to focus a lot of attention, I guess, on what I'm making maybe, and [my son] wants to be right there.... And it's just hard because he's right underfoot sometimes and some nights he's just wanting me to hold him and watch what I'm doing. (Cassie)

Children's Misbehavior and Fussiness

Another perceived challenge which several of the full-time stay-at-home mothers described is disciplining or attempting to assist their children when they display inappropriate behavior or when they feel cranky or fussy. Several mothers talked specifically about not knowing how to handle "discipline issues," as is shown in these comments:

The biggest negatives for me are sometimes not knowing how to handle discipline issues and things like that and getting a little frustrated. (Deborah)

... discipline and obeying issues [are challenging] now. And even if we are playing or something and she starts to get a bit more physical. You know, it's part of being a parent, but it's not my favorite part. Most parents like the fun stuff, and it's not the discipline and the getting your child out the door. And just having them obey you is difficult. (Adrianna)

Everyday there's some moment when my children do something new that they've never done before—some tantrum in some place, like I'm in the middle of the jewelry store or something—some tantrum they've never done.... Blake just bit somebody the other day. It's just those things that surprise me and I don't have anything to cope with them. I haven't prepared any plan to deal with my child biting someone else. Or Malinna throwing a fit in the middle of the store where there's lots of well-dressed people and they're being very quiet and staring at my child. Those are the kinds of times when I feel really inadequate because I don't have—not just no plan B, but no plan A to deal with this. Those are times I can't control. (Anne)

A lot of times I feel like I'm clueless. I mean, a lot of it's self-explanatory, but the discipline issues and... that's different. It doesn't really hit until two and a half to 3 years of age.... Maybe they were really good at disciplining him at daycare and not when I was in control. It's hard. And being consistent—it's difficult. (Deborah)

Many mothers also find it challenging to soothe their children when they are feeling irritable or sad.

I wish my babies didn't get cranky. On some days they're cranky and fussy like they're tired, even if they just got up from a nap and just napped for 3 hours. And I have off days, so they get to have off days, too. Just the little—there's going to be things that just aren't always right. (Kalleen)

[Another challenge is] when they're screaming at me all the time, and not wanting to sleep, when they're teething. (Sally)

[One thing that's challenging is] when you have them both screaming at the same time and needing my attention. Trying to just take a step back and say, "OK, this one is just going to have to cry because I'm attending to this one." That level of stress—because I can just feel myself getting tense and flustered.... (Amber)

Negative Comments From Others About the Stay-At-Home Mother Role

The full-time stay-at-home mothers also reported receiving a few negative comments from some acquaintances about their role as stay-at-home mothers. The following passages hint at the frustration these mothers feel when, on occasion, some people seem to view them as lazy, unintelligent, or "second-class," or assume they are "just" mothers that have "no other ambitions."

If you stay home you're a lazy parasite off of your husband and if you go to work you're a bad mom, so what's a lady to do? (Kalleen)

Occasionally you'll run into people who will [say], "Yeah. OK, you can't be that smart if all you do is stay home with kids." (Kalleen)

And you still have a lot of people that kind of look at you like, "Oh, you're staying at *home*! You must not have a career or must not even be interested in that sort of thing." ... There are people that probably assume that you might not be able to have a career anyways. (Sally)

People ask me what do I do and I say I'm a mom. They're like, "Oh, you have no other aspirations?" I'm like, "Of course I have aspirations." It doesn't mean that they're more important than being a mom. So I feel bad sometimes about that, kind of like I'm a second-class citizen. (Anne)

I think when people ask me what I do and I say I stay home with kids, I think they have a different picture of me than if I said, "Oh, I'm [in] human resources and I work for...." A couple of people have said something like, "Oh, you just stay home." I'm like, "Well, it's not *just*. Yes I do, but there's more to it." I think they have a feeling that, they maybe don't know that I have a college degree or that I have been in the work force and have done other things and that I did have a career and that kind of thing. They think, "She just stays at home with her kids and watches soap operas," and that's definitely not the case. (Amber)

Many mothers also suggested that many people simply do not understand what a stay-at-home mother does, particularly if they do not yet have children or have not stayed at home full time

themselves. The subsequent statements suggest that such a lack of understanding causes some mothers to feel defensive or to feel a need to “justify” their role to others:

So, yeah, usually I just tell people [I’m a stay-at-home mom] and some people don’t quite understand it, but some people do. (Deborah)

I think I’d like people to know that when you can’t figure out what a stay-at-home mom does, just look at their child and, you know, most parents get that. It’s the non-parents that kind of look at you with a blank expression and wonder, “What do you do all day long?” And you’ll say, “Stay with my daughter for two hours and you’ll realize what I do all day long.” (Adrianna)

Sometimes I feel like I have to justify what I do every day to make it sound like, you know, it’s worthwhile. And sometimes it’s just like, “I don’t care. It’s what I do, I love it. I don’t care what you think.” (Amber)

One mother specifically described often feeling as if others “are at a loss of what to say” to her in a conversation because she is a stay-at-home mother. She said,

They say, “What do [you] do?” and then they find out that I stay at home with my child full time and then that’s it. They don’t—well, it’s hard for people to quantify. You don’t want to talk about housework or anything in your conversations. I mean it is drudge work, let’s face it. It’s not glamorous. So people are at a loss of what to say to you. (Adrianna)

Even though most of the full-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed experienced some negative reactions from acquaintances in regards to their job as stay-at-home mothers, it is interesting to note that these mothers’ families and closer friends are quite supportive and understanding of their stay-at-home mother roles, as is shown in the following comments:

And as far as family... I think they probably think I’m lucky, which I am, to be able to choose and be able to stay at home. (Cassie)

My mother-in-law was a stay-at-home mom until her youngest was 10... so she’s real supportive, and my father-in-law [says], “Yeah, I think kids should have their mom home!” So they’re real supportive. My mom doesn’t say a whole lot about it, but I think she’s alright with it. She thinks I’m a “decent, respectable contribution to society.” Thanks mom!! And most of my friends are good about it. (Kalleen)

Well, I have several friends that have [stayed at home], so I think they think, “Well, where else would you be?” (Cassie)

In sum, most of the mothers I interviewed described receiving some negative comments or reactions from people who simply do not know them personally and who do not understand what stay at home

mothering entails; however, family and friends seem to be supportive simply because they know these mothers first-hand and have witnessed or experienced what staying at home is like.

Isolation and Lack of Connection

Another perceived challenge of staying at home full time, which several mothers described, was feeling a bit separated from the world outside of mothering, diapers, and housework. One mother suggested that her lack of connection with the news or other world events stemmed largely from her busy schedule, which caused her to have a “narrow” focus. She said,

I'll be honest, sometimes I'm so focused on my family life that I really don't either have time to see what's going on in the news or whatever or in the world because I'm just so caught up in daily life. You know, basic needs: feeding people, changing them, and getting them dressed. But sometimes my focus gets a little narrow. (Adrianna)

Adrianna also described feeling “isolated” and disconnected from “what’s out there” because she no longer has the social interaction she had at work.

[As a stay-at-home mom] you lose your connection with your workplace and you don't really know what's out there. I think you can get pretty isolated if you don't make an effort to go out and meet people. I mean, they're not going to come to you and if you've been working most of your life and that's where most of your contacts are from, it can be hard to make new contacts once you stay at home because everyone you knew is at work. (Adrianna)

Other mothers said they only experienced feelings of isolation when they first made the transition from working to staying at home full time.

Well the first year actually was the hardest. That transition going from working to all the sudden staying at home and you don't really know other people that have kids at this age and you're trying to figure out what to do.... (Sally)

[Not having my extended family close by was] probably the thing that I felt most when I stayed at home. Because when I had work, I had other people around. But when I stayed at home and stopped working, I just felt more alone. It would be a lot easier if we had family. (Adrianna)

Interestingly, staying at home seems to be less isolating for these mothers in the summer months because they can more easily “get out,” as opposed to going “stir-crazy” in the winter months.

In the winter, well, that's kind of tough. We still go outside if it's not a sub-zero kind of day.... We have to be outside, otherwise I just go stir-crazy and they do, too. (Sally)

It seems to be a lot easier in the summer. We can go for walks after dinner. We have a park down the street. In the summer, almost everyday after dinner we walk to the park. You just feel a little more closed in in the winter. (Deborah)

In the summer—we live pretty close to Roosevelt school, just a couple blocks down the street, so we go down there. The older one absolutely loves it and when the younger one walks I'm sure he's going to love it. So next summer I'm really looking forward to getting out. (Kalleen)

These statements about the benefits of “getting out” seem to indirectly indicate that spending too much time at home, or being “closed in,” may be one cause of the sense of seclusion described by some of the full-time mothers I interviewed.

Children Miss the Social Benefits of Daycare

Some mothers said another disadvantage of staying at home full time is that their children do not have the opportunity to gain the social interaction they would experience if they attended daycare.

Nathan has been both [at home and in daycare] and I think one of the things he loses is that structured social interaction. The daycare he was at was pretty good. It was almost like a preschool because they did a lot of educational types of things and it was like a school. They had a schedule for the day. That was nice. We still have a schedule, but it's not as, I mean, we don't pull out the letters and talk about the letter “A” today and all of that kind of stuff. I mean, we do once in a while but not as structured as that. So that school-type atmosphere is lacking from being here with me. (Amber)

And I even think for my son, he misses out a little bit on the social interaction with other children. You know, children at daycare, they learn how to share. Maybe they don't learn it as well as we'd like them to, but they learn to interact with other kids really well. (Cassie)

In contrast, however, Anne believes that social interaction can be learned in places other than daycare, such as through playgroups, playing at the park, or even the play-place at a fast food establishment. She said,

I think it's important for them to socialize with other children regularly because then they learn—when you teach them something at home, they have to be with other children to practice it. But you don't have to be in daycare to get that. You can find a playmate or another mom with small children, a playgroup, go to the playground, you know. McDonald's Play-place is always a good place to learn to behave around other children. (Anne)

In short, although children may miss some the social interaction of daycare, some mothers believe their children can gain social interactions in other ways.

Lower Household Income

A final downside of being a stay-at-home mother, according to the mothers I interviewed, is having only one income instead of two. The following two passages illustrate this challenge:

We had two incomes before we had kids and there were never any money concerns. It was always, "I think I'm going to get that." So you get it. Now that we have kids and only one income, it's, "Well, now do I really need that? No." Then you wait a while. It's funny. For your birthday you're excited about net socks or something: "Oooohhh! New socks!" (Sally)

...Not having the income is kind of a negative because you can't afford to put as much away for college or retirement as you'd like, or what you're used to doing and stuff. (Deborah)

Theme 4. Social Contact and "Me Time"

The full-time stay-at-home mothers also talked about three main areas related to "me time" and social contact with other adults, listed as follows: (a) "taking care" of themselves, which includes having time alone and "getting away" from the responsibilities of housework and parenting; (b) "getting out" of the house and interacting with other adults, and (c) social networking with other mothers to get ideas about raising one's children, as well as to simply feel supported in the mothering role.

"Taking Care of Myself"

Several mothers described feeling disappointed that they do not have enough free time, or time to have a break from their mothering and household responsibilities to "take care" of themselves. For example, Deborah said, "I find that the biggest thing that I need is to do something different once in a while, which is hard to schedule sometimes." Cassie similarly said, "I don't feel sometimes that I get that time away that I need—just me time without having to worry about what's going on with [my son]. I wish I had a little more of that."

Many of these mothers would also simply like more time to spend on hobbies or to be with friends, as is suggested in these comments:

There's a lot of things I would like to do, but a lot of them, the free time just doesn't come up as often [as I would like]. I like to window shop in stores with friends. I like to talk with friends. (Kalleen)

I can't get it out of my mindset to say, "You know, you just need to take a little time for yourself and scrapbook more," but I can't do it. I have to leave the house to be able to sit down and do it.... I think that's the hardest thing to come to terms with. I kind of thought that I would be able to have a little bit more free time. (Cassie)

What little "free time" these mothers have is often spent with their children nearby, as is illustrated in these passages:

Sometimes I can get a chance to read then a little bit if they're playing nicely. (Kalleen)

I don't know if I would necessarily say that I really have free time. [The kids are] usually with me. But, I mean, they're very good about doing stuff with me.... I have learned to make the most of the few minutes I get during the day and really the girls are quite good about playing together so I can do things close by when necessary. (Sally)

Additionally, several mothers explained that much of their "free time," particularly when their children are napping, is spent doing household tasks, like organizing or cleaning.

In my free time I'll split between getting a project done—doing one thing for the house that's organizing or cleaning, that I can't do with the kids around, and doing some writing, or reading. (Anne)

[In my free time I] clean. It usually ends up being some kind of housework. (Adrianna)

Although *true* free time does not often happen for these mothers, most of them have special, relaxing things they enjoy doing when they're "absolutely free," as is illustrated in the following comments:

If I'm absolutely free, I get caught up on our financial stuff or write letters or make phone calls to friends. Watch TV. Just kind of unwind. You know, anything, from read the paper and just general life stuff. I'd like to get to the point that I'm so caught up I can finally start a scrapbook or something like that. (Adrianna)

[In my free time] I like to write....Or revise what I've written. Or I like to do a project that I haven't been able to do because it's something that requires say, glue, or scissors, or things like that where if you laid out everything—sorting, filing things—where if you laid out everything and there were children in the room, it wouldn't work. It would be completely destroyed. I'd like to get things like that done. (Anne)

What's [free time]? Free time, like by myself when I can actually leave? I haven't had a lot since [my second child] Zachary has been born. I go to movies, go shopping. Just to get out and about. I like to read. Not so much books because I don't have a lot of time to sit down read night after night after night to keep it going. But magazines and that kind of thing. (Amber)

Several mothers explained that they have had to learn to “take care of” themselves by scheduling personal free time. For example, Adrianna is able to take better care of herself by scheduling time to relax or exercise. She explained,

I think I’m taking care of myself a little better than when I first decided to stay at home. I’m exercising. I’m doing what I need to do. I don’t feel guilty anymore about, you know, if she’s taking a nap, about just plopping down in front of the TV and having an ice cream cone, because if that’s what I need, that’s what I need. And I used to feel, “Oh, I should be doing something else.” But I know myself better to know that the other stuff will get done when it gets done and I need to take care of myself. (Adrianna)

She added,

I don’t see myself as a martyr so I think I take pretty good care of myself. I don’t run myself into the ground. I put my daughter’s needs first and mine are right up there with her. I’ve been able to develop a schedule in the day that when she’s taking her nap or doing her own thing I have my little time together, just for myself. Or I go to the gym, you know, just thirty minutes a day helps me keep my sanity. When I wasn’t doing that, I was pretty stressed out. But finally I figured I need some time for myself. (Adrianna)

Some mothers even get up early or stay up late just to have time alone.

Well, I get up at 5:30 so I can have some time to exercise, time for myself. (Anne)

When I read it’s usually after he’s gone to bed. And sometimes after my husband has gone to bed, too, I’ll stay up for another half hour, 45 minutes, and that’s my “Oh, it’s time for me. I can read something for fun, or I can take a nice bath, or just veg. in front of the television if I want to.” It’s kind of nice to have a little bit of time like that.... (Kalleen)

Some day’s the thing I enjoy most is after the kids are in bed and it’s quiet and I’ve got some time to do whatever. (Amber)

“Getting Out” and Interacting With Adults

Many of these mothers also find it important to “get out” of the house and to see and talk to other adults. One mother described the stress of always being with her children and not leaving the house often enough:

But there are definitely different stresses in staying home full time, too, [like] not getting out of the house, being with your children constantly. Which is wonderful, I mean, I love being home with them, but there’s no break. They go to the grocery store with me, they go.... Wherever you go, they go. And a lot of times I just don’t go anywhere because it’s easier just to [wait for my husband]. (Amber)

Sally similarly said, "And of course there are those days when you just don't want to stay home and you say, 'Steve! It's your turn. They're your kids. You take them!'"

In order to deal with the sometimes monotonous and difficult job of caring for children at home for most of the day, many mothers feel the need for adult interaction. Three mothers specifically mentioned enjoying and even needing opportunities to talk specifically about adult topics.

[Since I began staying at home] it's more important to me to go out. Before we moved to Iowa I taught and was going to school and I had Malinna. I was a mom, but I worked and I was out of the house all the time. But then we moved here and I didn't have a job, I didn't have anywhere to go, so it became very important to get contact with other adults—um, not just mothers to ask questions and talk about being a mom—but just other adults to talk about things kids can't talk about. "What do you think about God? Why do you think the universe spins this way?" Or concepts about physics that I enjoy, or literature, or all these things that I can't talk to Malinna about. The intellectual stimulation with other adults. That was very important. (Anne)

Some days I think, "Gosh, wouldn't it be nice to be able to go to work and talk to adults. I'd be working, but talk to people all day." But then, I know I'd come home and I'd be crazy probably, but at least I would have talked to adults. (Cassie)

Sometimes going to work was, "I can go hang around with all adults and we don't have to talk about stories or, *Are you my mother?* book." Not that those things aren't great. They're fantastic and I love it, but sometimes it's nice to have adult conversation. (Kalleen)

One mother also described often wanting to simply *see* other adults, even if she does not necessarily talk to them. Therefore, she and her son will often run errands together, or she will go work out at the YMCA and put him in the nursery there. She explained,

Now, are there days that I feel like I'm a little confined and I've seen too much baby? Yes! I just want to get out. Yeah, there are days like that. And sometimes that's when I'll go up to the store just to see other adults.... We'll go run errands. So there are days like that. But I did join the Y[MCA] a couple of months ago, too, which has kind of helped, because then I can put him in the Kids' Corner there and I can go work out for an hour. And I've enjoyed that....That's kind of my other outlet, I guess, because then I have a couple girlfriends and we might chat a couple minutes before we exercise and a couple minutes after. (Cassie)

Other mothers interact with adults in a diverse number of settings, including book and game clubs, visiting family, or going to the zoo.

I'm in a book club, so I go do that usually Tuesday nights. I'm in the ISU women's club. And one of the groups I'm in is called "Mothers and Children" which meets Thursday

mornings....One of the other groups I'm in is "Newcomers," and that's in the evening. (Deborah)

We visit family a lot on the weekends. (Kalleen)

I...get out of the house at least once a month. I play Bunko with some girlfriends. (Cassie)

I still take the girls places. We go out. like to the zoo. the Living History Farms. so you get out at least. (Sally)

Several mothers also volunteer frequently, such as at church, museums, or other organizations like La Leche League, which can be quite satisfying. Some mothers explained.

I work in the primary [at church], which is like the young Sunday school group. When I do service projects or teaching classes or whatever I work with them. I feel a lot of intellectual satisfaction or social satisfaction from working with others, from getting work accomplished because when you work at home you're constantly interrupted and it's very infrequently that you get a complete job done in a day because—even when it's naptime and quiet time—every 10 minutes there's something that interrupts. So it's really satisfying being able to complete things, work with others, and see a job finished. (Anne)

[Volunteering] adds and takes away. The time commitment, but on the other hand, ... you get more grown-up talk time. But, yeah, I mean, you get a sense of satisfaction from doing something for other kids. (Sally)

Now that I have been staying home, I'm just starting to get more active with [church]. Before it was like we went to church on Sunday and that was it. Now I help out with Bible school.... I'm going to a circle, which is a women's group in the church that meets once a month and that kind of thing. That's more for me than anything though. (Amber)

Finally, many mothers also mentioned experiencing a greater sense of dependence on their husband to provide them with some adult interaction.

That may be one thing that—since I'm home and not out of the house as much as I was, I call [my husband] more during the day and "What are you doing?" And he's like, "What do you want?" "Nothing, just seeing what you are doing." You know I'm more dependent on him I guess for entertainment than what I was. (Amber)

My relationship with my husband is a lot closer [since I began staying at home]. I rely more on him, he relies more on me because I don't have this huge network of friends in my workplace that I talk to or tell my fears and aspirations to. I just have him, because he's my main contact. (Anne)

It is obvious that adult contact is important for stay-at-home mothers; as a result, these mothers find opportunities to interact with adults through a number of settings, as has been described.

Support Network With Other Mothers

A final means through which many of the full-time stay-at-home mothers gain social interaction is through talking to other mothers. Most mothers agreed that they really enjoy their contact with other mothers. For example, Kalleen and Adrianna, respectively, said,

[Now that I stay at home] I've had to go out of my way to meet other mothers and other parents. And that's been rewarding because my daughter has friends and we have a nice little circle getting started now. (Adrianna)

But I've actually been really lucky in finding a couple of other moms in the area that I can call and say, "OK, I'm doing this right now. Can you just talk to me for a little while?" They're great and we get together a couple times a week. That's real nice. (Kalleen)

Meeting other mothers seems to be fairly easy for most of the full-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed. As the following comments show, interaction with other mothers occurs within the neighborhood, at parks, and at children's play groups:

I always was afraid that if I stayed at home—you know, you always hear the stuff in the media about "Oh, I never get to talk to another adult." but I haven't found that here in Ames. There's a lot of people in the community doing the same thing I'm doing and they're all out and about going to the park, you know, and "Play Pals" at the community center. So I never felt that as something missing, you know. I think that's important. I think if I lived out in the middle of the country and never saw anybody on a regular basis, I think you'd miss out a little bit on the community helping you raise your kid almost.... Some of the [mother-child play] groups I'm in are scheduled, you know, once a week. Or, you know, I used to in the summer on Tuesdays there's a whole group of people that go to the park, you know, for lunch and some people hang out at the Brookside wading pool. It's a small enough town that you see people around town and eventually you introduce yourself and you start talking to them and stuff.... (Deborah)

Neighbors are also great. There are lots of people in this neighborhood with kids that are older. So being able to talk with them is helpful. We used to go to "Play Pals," which is at the community gym. We met a lot of parents with kids the same ages. You get to talking, "What's your kid doing?" "What's your kids doing?" You get a lot of interaction that way. Going to the park—you just go with the flow. Everybody's going to the same place at the same time. You find people to talk to. (Sally)

Such contact with other mothers provides the mothers I interviewed with a source of support and knowledge that helps them in rearing their children.

There's a support group, almost, in knowing other moms and seeing them once a week at a playgroup and you can ask them, "What did your child do at this age or that?" or "How did this work?" You know, when you start expecting your second child and you talk to other

moms who have two kids and say, "Well how did the older sibling handle the rivalry?" And it's very subtle. It's not like it's every week you get some great things out of it, but it's nice to have other people to communicate with about that. (Deborah)

I have some friends that are stay at home moms too, or that work part time and so I get to see them more [now that I stay at home]. We[']ve] probably become closer because we exchange similar types of stories and kind of support each other with stress and problems and that kind of thing. (Amber)

Well, pretty much everybody that I know, they may say, "So-and-so is doing this. What about your kid? Do you know anybody else that tended to do this?" Or, "Does this pass!?" Um, you know those kind of questions. And you can always find somebody that either has personal experience with that sort of situation or knew somebody and you just kind of swap stories about what they tried, if it's something that needs to be fixed, and see if that works. Or, if you just want to brag or whatever. There's always somebody out there that knew somebody else that did something. (Sally)

Finally, one mother also described gaining support from her mother and mother-in-law. She said,

I think my [extended] family is a little bit closer, too, [now that I stay at home,] even though we're long distance, because...I feel inadequate a lot and so I feel like I need a big support group. My mother's done it before and my mother-in-law's great. I call her sometimes and tell her the funny things or the terrible things the kids have done and she gives me perspective. Like Blake dumped out a box of Chex on the floor, just as we were leaving, and we thought that was just terrible. But if I talk to my mother-in-law, she'll laugh and say, "I just can't believe those kids. It's amazing in how little time they can destroy things." But she's laughing and she's got this [humor] in her voice, and I think, "Oh yeah, that's a better way to look at it. That is a funny thing." It is really funny. (Anne)

Theme 5. "Good" Mothering

Most of the mothers I interviewed had a clear idea of what "good" mothering encompasses.

These mothers described the "ideal mother" as one who is loving, fun, patient, fair, and firm when necessary, as well as one who teaches her children positive values that will help them grow up to make constructive contributions to society. Several mothers also described other mothers whom they admire, including their own mothers or friends. Finally, these mothers explained how they personally evaluate their mothering, often on a daily basis, to determine whether they have done a "good" job with their children. Several comments illustrate how these mothers evaluate themselves according to their own personal standard, in comparison with other mothers, as well as based on the behavior of their children.

The Ideal Mother

Most of the full-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed have a clear idea about what an ideal mother is like. These mothers consistently used words like “loving,” “patient,” “fun,” “fair,” and “firm” to describe their image of an ideal mom. Their belief in the importance of a mother’s love for their children is portrayed in the ensuing remarks:

[Good mothering includes] taking care of those basic needs and having a child feel that they’re loved. I don’t think there’s anything else. It doesn’t matter how much money you have, what you buy your children, what you give them. All they want is you and to know that you love them and to have those needs taken care of. (Cassie)

I would like each of my kids to think they’re my favorite. But I’m not really certain how to approach anything like that. I want to always respond to them fairly.... Fairly and lovingly, always set good standards, always be a consistent disciplinarian. Make sure they know no matter what that they’re loved. I guess that would be—if you can get that across to them: “Mommy and Daddy always love you. We may be disappointed in some things you do, but we always love you.” (Kalleen)

Several mothers also mentioned being patient, fun, and firm as an important virtues portrayed by the ideal mother.

[An ideal mother is] patient, fun, strict but not stern. (Amber)

I think an ideal mother would be one that stays home with their children, one that is patient and encouraging, but firm with their children—gives them limits so they know what is good and bad, where the boundaries are for their behaviors. One that doesn’t yell but explains that it’s OK to be angry, it’s not OK to yell, or fight, or hurt people. Not a suppressed person, but a well-balanced, calm person. (Anne)

[An ideal mother is] patient, caring, understanding, [has a] sense of humor, sense of fun, I guess. (Deborah)

Two mothers suggested that an ideal mother should not sacrifice her own needs for that of her children. They said,

The perfect mother would be focused on her children and her husband—not the children over the husband—but on her family, but in a reasonable way: not sacrificing her health or other things that are important to be a whole person. (Anne)

I think a good mother teaches her kids that she’s a person, too, and that her needs need to be respected. (Adrianna)

Another important element of being a “good” mother, according to these women, is teaching children the values and skills they will need to be respectable, contributing members of society.

Adrianna explained, “I think a really good mother is able to teach her children the things that she thinks are important, is able to teach them in word and example....” The following passages reveal some of the values that different mothers believe are important to teach their children:

I want them to be smart and social and, you know, all of those things that I think that every parent wants their child to be like. So I try to think about those things throughout the day: “Am I teaching them good things or am I teaching them bad things?” (Amber)

I think that’s what a good parent is—is teaching your child how to love and be loved and how to respect other people. (Adrianna)

[I want to teach my children to] be kind to others, be truthful, get along with others, be respectful, knowing right from wrong. (Amber)

My ideals, I guess, are based on an old adage from my Catholic upbringing: “Do unto others as you would have done unto you.” I really think we need to stop and think about how what we do impacts others, whether you are looking at littering, to helping out a friend in need. While being recognized for what you are doing to help is nice, it is more important that you feel a sense of self-worth and satisfaction from the act itself. Sometimes this means those “Random Acts of Kindness,” and anonymity. Yes, I want my kids to pick up on that! (Sally)

I want to teach her to be generous of spirit, friendly, and considerate. I want to teach her to be brave and to take risks and not to be afraid of what other people might think. I want to teach her that it’s OK to show affection to people and be loving towards them, the regular stuff about right from wrong. (Adrianna)

Interestingly, although most of these mothers have a clear concept of what an ideal mother is like, several said they also believe that ideal mothering depends largely on the circumstances of each individual mother, her family, and her children:

Every child is different and every family is different. There’s no one set way of being an ideal parent or ideal mother or father. (Adrianna)

[I think ideal mothering is] different for every person. I don’t think there is an ideal mother. I think some people are meant to be stay-at-home moms; they’ve got that nurturing personality. But that doesn’t mean that the career woman who has pursued her career cannot be an ideal mother. I’m sure a lot of women who are career mothers focus a lot of attention on their children when they do come home. I don’t know that there is an ideal, and I don’t think you’d want it that way—everybody the same. (Cassie)

[I guess ideal mothering] might be different for different people. For each child's temperament there might be a different ideal mother to deal with that temperament. (Kalleen)

Admiration for Role Models

The second area of "good" mothering, which many of the full-time stay-at-home mothers discussed, is admiration for role models, including their own mothers or friends who are mothers. The subsequent passages demonstrate how many of these mothers look up to their own mothers as examples of "good" mothering.

I've got several role model mothers probably. I mean, my mom, of course. I think she's a great mom. I think she was a great mom when we were little, too. (Amber)

I guess I look up to my mom. While I was growing up she was a single parent working mother, so it's not that she did the same thing that I'm doing, but I never doubted that she loved my brother and I and she always seemed to have—I don't ever remember her telling us, "No, we're not going to do this. No, this is silly. I'm too tired to do this." Looking back now, I'm amazed. She's a super-human. I don't know how she did it. I really look up to her for that. I hope my own kids can look back and think that about me once they're grown. (Kalleen)

One mother not only admires her own mother, but her mother-in-law, as well. She said,

I think my mother is a role-model for me, but also [my husband's] mom is. I think I look at the two of them and I see a couple ideal qualities that together would make them perfect moms. Like my mother has a great personality and sense of humor and she's always been my friend, which was very important. I felt very supported by her as a child. But she's also very determined and self-sacrificing and I admire what she gave up for us. She had six children, and she had other dreams, but the children came along and she didn't expect her husband to be sick, but she just did what needed to be done and took care of us and I admire her for that. I also admire my mother-in-law because her children are everything to her. She loves them and enjoys them. The last part is really important to me. My mother-in-law enjoys children. One of the things is she smiles when they cry, she smiles when they throw fits, she smiles when they are happy. She just enjoys them and enjoys being with them and watching them, playing with them, and I hadn't met anyone like that before, that just enjoyed all of the parts. And I think that's ideal in a mother because of course you're not always going to have happy clean children. You know, so if you're enjoying every part, then you're really going to enjoy being a mom. So if I put my two mothers together, that would be the ideal mom. (Anne)

While one full-time stay-at-home mother admires her mother, she simultaneously tries to avoid some of the parenting behaviors her mother exhibited. She explained,

I very definitely know things that [my mom] did that I'm trying not to do—not because they made me feel bad or that I think I'm damaged—it's just that she was trained by her mother and they grew up in a different era and a different country even and that's not necessarily the

way that I feel right now. Things like spanking and discipline issues are not something I'm comfortable doing with my child, so I've specifically chosen not to do that.... But I think on the whole, I think I'm pretty much doing what she does. I ask her for advice and I remember I didn't want for affection. I wish I could be a little bit more like my mom in some ways, but I'm doing the best I can. (Adrianna)

Finally, two mothers described how they look up to some friends who are also mothers. They said,

There's a friend of mine who lives in Nebraska. I think she's a great mom. She's got a little boy that's a little bit older than Nathan and she's having a baby, too.... When we're together with our kids it's just interesting to see how they interact and their parenting skills and that kind of thing. She's one I've actually called for advice and I'm, "OK, what did you do? When Jordan did this, what did you do and how did you know this?" and that kind of stuff. (Amber)

One of my best friends from college... got married 3 years before I did and she was an elementary teacher and she was a kindergarten teacher for 3 years and then they started having kids. And the minute they had their first kid she stopped working. She's got four kids under 5 and she makes it look so easy. She just—we go over to their house—it's not too hectic.... She's my role model. If she can do it with four, I should be able to do it with two! (Deborah)

Personal Evaluation of Self and Child

As the interviewer I asked the mothers I interviewed if they believed they were good mothers.

While most responded affirmatively, many mothers said they evaluate themselves both positively and negatively at different times, depending on the interactions they have recently had with their children.

One quote from Anne provides an example of the mixture of personal approval or disapproval that many of these mothers feel toward their mothering performance:

I guess at the end of each day I decide if I was a good mother that day. So I guess all the days together, on average, yeah, [I feel like a good mother]. But there are some days where I feel like I was just a lousy mother. (Anne)

Many of the situations in which mothers reported feeling they did not "measure up" to their personal expectations of good mothering relate to being patient with their children when they were misbehaving or were being fussy. In the subsequent passages Anne and Amber both describe frustrating situations with their children in which they lost their tempers:

Other times when I feel even more inadequate are the times I can control, meaning when I'm in a situation...and I lose my temper or I get angry. Whether I say something to Malinna that's angry or not, I feel angry and it's a waste of energy to be angry at that situation because you can't control it. Being angry at a child and talking to them angrily—at least with my

children—doesn't help. So that's when I feel really inadequate. I come home and say, "I can't do this! I don't have the patience. I don't have the endurance. I don't have the ability to live well with 5 hours of sleep!" (Anne)

Oh yeah, I usually tell [my husband] when he comes home, "I had a bad parenting day today." You know, if I've lost my temper and I've done something differently than what we had talked about how we wanted to handle our kids as far as discipline and stuff and you know I have quite a bit of patience but there are some days that I just have had it with patience and it's like, "I know that this is not the way that it should be done, but this is the way that it's going to be done right now." And Nathan in the stage now everything is, "Why? Why does it do that?" and I try really hard to give him answers for everything, but at a certain point it becomes, "Because mommy said so," which I said I would never do because it doesn't make sense.... And usually at that point it stops, the questioning stops, so I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing. But, yeah, there are definitely days that I wish I could do over again because I feel like I haven't been the best parent that I could be. (Amber)

Other mothers talked about regretting that they often do not "do enough" with their children.

I don't think I do as much as I thought I would with my son, or as much as I had wanted to. (Cassie)

Sometimes I feel like I don't play with the kids enough because they like to play all day long. But I'm like, "I have to do laundry. I can't play all day." (Deborah)

Evaluating the behavior of one's children is another method by which many of these mothers evaluate whether they are engaging in "good" mothering. Some mothers explained.

If the girls are comfortable talking about anything and everything with me, polite, respect others' feelings, happy, giggly, and enjoy spending time with me, I must be doing something right! (Sally)

You know, I'm at another person's house and James says, "Can I have another bowl of popcorn *please*." They're like, "He said *please*!" And I'm, "Well, I taught him to say please." (Deborah)

Adrianna also described feeling she is "on the right track" as a mother when her family makes positive comments about her daughter. She said,

[I can tell I'm doing a good job as a mother] just by looking at my daughter and seeing the way she's developing and whether she communicates well. I mean, I know what times when I'm not doing—when I'm falling short of the mark. I feel that myself. No one needs to tell me about that. But also when family comes to visit or we visit them and they see her and they say she doing so well. That kind of gives me encouragement that I'm on the right track. (Adrianna)

Several mothers also described observing and appraising other mothers' interactions with their children, often as a way to learn new ways of doing things with their own children.

Everybody compares themselves to everybody else. I'd be lying if I didn't. Um, but then again I always have to step back and say, "Oh, yeah, my house isn't nearly as clean," but I don't pay somebody to come clean it twice a week either! Yeah, or, well, "Well, my kid's doing this," "Well, my kid's doing that." Yeah, but, I don't know if it's [comparing] in a bad way or a good way. You just notice some differences. (Sally)

I think in my search to figure out better ways to do things, I seek advice, so I compare myself in that way. I'm always on the lookout for easier ways to do things or to teach my daughter something—new ideas if something isn't working.... So yeah, I compare myself [to other mothers], but it's not like a derogatory kind of comparison, like they're so good and I'm so awful. It's more like I'm trying to figure out how to do something kind of comparison. (Adrianna)

I see people at the grocery store and I watch how they handle their kids or interact with their kids and whether it be good or bad. [And I think], "Oh, I would never do that," or I'd say something like, "Oh that's a good idea." (Amber)

Finally, many mothers assess their mothering proficiency and the behavior of their children by reading child rearing books or magazines, as is indicated in these statements:

I'm a voracious reader.... I read anything and everything I can get my hands on. I did that the whole time I was pregnant the first time—everything I could find, you know, "OK, he's 3 months old. What should he be doing now and what can I be doing now?" Anything I could get my hands on. (Kalleen)

[I also read] *Parenting Magazine* or *Parents Magazine*. I think that's a great thing to read because it gives tips on what other parents have done that worked for them and that kind of stuff. (Amber)

Theme 6: The Marriage Relationship and Division of Household Labor/Child Rearing

All of the full-time mothers discussed aspects of their marriage relationships and their interactions with their spouses, stated both directly and indirectly that they felt they were better equipped than their husbands to be the stay-at-home parent, and discussed how they divide household labor and child rearing responsibilities with their spouses.

The Marriage Relationship

Most of the full-time stay-at-home mothers said that, for the most part, they have good marriage relationships with their husbands. Some mothers said,

I think we have a good marriage. We trust each other a lot. We're honest with each other. When there's a problem, we bring it up.... You won't be seeing us on Jerry Springer any time soon. (Adrianna)

My husband is a fantastic guy. I'm really lucky.... I really respect my husband and I think that he respects me. And he does tell me sometimes, "I really appreciate you. I know you're working really hard".... He's my sweetheart. (Kalleen)

I'd say [our marriage] is really good. I mean, we certainly have our days.... We have our little spats here and there—usually when he's doing some sort of remodeling projects and he's going too slow. (Sally)

I think we have it really good because, you know how people say it's supposed to be a partnership and all that? I think we really do have that. I don't feel like there's anything that could crop up that we couldn't work through. (Anne)

One mother expressed satisfaction that she and her husband have equal power over their finances. She said,

The one thing I'd read about or heard about from other women at home was the sense that since your husband is making the money, he is the one who decides how to spend it. And I've never, ever gotten that from him. I've never gotten anything but, "This is how much we've got in the bank." And we consult each other on purchases over like \$20. (Kalleen)

Two mothers also mentioned that divorces are not likely to be in their futures. They said,

Luckily I met a spouse who doesn't believe in ever getting divorced, so I don't have to worry about him walking in some day and going, "OK, this is the end." (Deborah)

I think the thing about us is that we're both in it for the long haul. I don't think it would ever occur [to] us to leave or split or anything like that. It just is not in either of our natures. So I think we're well matched. (Adrianna)

Most of these mothers said they believe their husbands understand and support their stay-at-home mothering role.

[My husband] is supportive and wonderful guy and understands that being at home is not sitting on the couch and watching soaps and eating bon-bons, or spending the day shopping. (Kalleen)

I think that my husband really appreciates that I stay at home with them and he values it and thinks it's important. (Deborah)

If I worked, then we'd have to share more responsibility in the household, and he likes being taken care of. So I think he likes me being home so I can take care of him and take care of Brock. (Cassie)

I think [my husband] envies me. I do. I think he's happy that I was able to make the decision [to stay at home] and he's happy for our daughter. (Adrianna)

However, although most mothers believe that their husbands appreciate them staying at home, two mothers specifically mentioned that their husbands probably do not completely understand what being a stay-at-home mother is truly like. They said,

I don't think [my husband] completely understands what it's like with two of them everyday and soon to be three. (Sally)

I think that there are people that don't understand what you do all day—probably my husband included. He knows I'm busy, but I don't think he knows the extent of sometimes how busy it is. (Cassie)

Several of these mothers talked about having less time to connect with their husbands and nurture the intimacy in their marriage relationships since having children.

You know, [my husband and I] miss each other a lot. We miss just being us two because we were together for quite a while before she was born. It's still something we have to work on and make a conscious effort to be together.... We're wondering how to get back, you know, that intimacy that we had before.... So we definitely need to spend more time alone together—just the two of us. Getting back to being a couple instead of a trio. (Adrianna)
We've been married 7 years. We just don't have the time for each other that we once had or would like to have. [We've] ...taken each other for granted, I guess. I mean. Mark's got a new job and he's really busy and he's kind of focusing on that and I'm trying to adjust to staying at home and being with the kids and getting out and organized. We've been focusing on opposite things and not each other.... Even when we're in the same house it's like we're really not in the same house until about 10:30 at night and then it's like, "Oh, I'm so tired. Goodnight." "See ya." We're a lot busier, I guess, and that has changed. As far as me staying home changing things, I don't think that that has occurred. (Amber)

Finally, two mothers also said their husbands experienced a slight sense of jealousy following the birth of their first child because they had less opportunity to interact with their wives:

Um, well when Brock came it definitely changed things a lot. My husband, you know, I think had a hard time at first dealing with that because he was the center of my attention and then this little life came. Of course we were both thrilled and excited because we wanted this little life so badly, but it definitely changed. And I had to realize that, you know, there are wifely duties and that he has certain needs and I have to remember that and take that into account and I can't always focus my attention on my son, that I have to remember him. Now, does he get remembered as often as he would like? Probably not, but I really work hard to try and focus some attention on him so he doesn't feel left out. I think that's important, and I think that's important for a marriage. (Cassie)

It took a while for us to get used to the ebb and flow of the intimacy, you know—how you related to your spouse. Um, I think it was hard for him, especially when the kids were very little with nursing and stuff, a lot of your needs for intimacy are shared with your baby or your other children more than—your spouse tends to come last. But over time that corrects itself and you get back on the same page. (Deborah)

In general, however, it seems clear that most of the full-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed have positive marriage relationships and experience a great deal of support from their spouses.

Why Moms—Not Dads—Stay at Home Full Time: Moms Feel Better Equipped

Many of the full-time stay-at-home mothers suggested they are better equipped than their husbands to care for their children and take care of their homes. These mothers' slight indication of their superior ability to perform the stay-at-home parenting role is based on several aspects. First, some mothers feel they are better equipped to be at home because they have the "proper plumbing."

When you first have a child, if you're breastfeeding, say, then the mother is the one that has to do that every two hours and it just seems ridiculous for her to go to work and stop every two hours to pump milk to send home when you're just physically equipped to take better care of the child in the 1st year at least. (Anne)

Then, of course, there was the whole breastfeeding issue—Steve just didn't have the proper plumbing. (Sally)

Many mothers also said that they, rather than their husbands, are the stay-at-home parent because they are more patient with their children.

[I stay at home] frankly, because he'd go nuts. He loves the kids and he loves being with them, but if he has to be by himself with them for extended periods of time, he doesn't have very much patience. So it's never been an issue. (Amber)

He's a wonderful man, but I have more patience towards the kids than he does. (Kalleen)

I am more patient with [the kids] in the long haul [than my husband.] Perhaps that is the "mothering hormones" released in breastfeeding or pregnancy? (Sally)

One mother chose to stay at home because she really wants to be "in charge of the house." She said,

I totally want to be in charge of the house because I think it's part of my nature. I like to take care of things. I like to keep things organized. My idea of clean and organized is different than his idea of clean and organized, too, so if I want it done my way, I've got to do it my way. And that's how I've always been ever since we've been together, and we've been together 16 ½ years, so I've created a monster. He's used to me taking care of him all the time. (Cassie)

Many of these mothers also said they have always wanted to stay at home, while their husbands were always more career oriented and enjoy getting out. They explained.

[My husband] graduated from Iowa State in computer engineering—very career oriented, very focused, I mean. I was always about having kids, staying home. I'm not that career motivated. So it was never even an issue. (Cassie)

He has the big career that he's always dreamed of. For me, my jobs were just that: jobs. They never really were something that I was driven to do. I found work in the fields or the areas that I like to work in, with people that I liked, but I was never really a career person. I didn't find that career, that big career that consumed me all the time. My husband is a musician, so he works—he does music—24 hours a day. (Adrianna)

[Staying at home with the kids is] not anything [my husband] has ever wanted to do. Again, not that he doesn't enjoy being with them—It's just, he also enjoys being out, being an adult. (Amber)

Finally, several mothers mentioned that they, rather than their husbands, stay at home because their husbands make more money.

He had a bigger paycheck, so that was a no-brainer. (Adrianna)

He would have been good at [staying at home], but I think with him getting his graduate degree, financially it's better for him to work, I guess. (Deborah)

Division of Household Labor and Child Rearing Responsibilities

Each of the full-time stay-at-home mothers seemed to indicate that she does more of the household labor than her husbands. Several specifically said that they do the majority of indoor household tasks, while their husbands are in charge of the lawn and outdoor maintenance, as the following passages illustrate:

It's true that I do the bulk of the indoor stuff and he does most of the hard labor outside. (Adrianna)

And then he of course takes care of all the lawn stuff, but as far as in the house, I pretty much take care of it. (Cassie)

Other mothers said they and their husbands do not always divide household work according to “indoor” and “outdoor,” but instead do what they each prefer to do.

He does his own laundry and I do everybody else's—you know, the common things. I do most of the cleaning.... He'll make a job list and do a lot of the maintenance things around

the house, and—like our garage door is acting up, and that's his realm, definitely. I have no idea what to do with the garage door that won't go down and won't go up. I mean, he's pretty good. We split the yard work probably pretty evenly.... We've come to figure out who likes to do what and who doesn't like to do what and he's not a big fan of yard work but neither am I, so we kind of split it. (Deborah)

[My husband] hasn't cleaned a bathroom for 4 years. He just doesn't clean bathrooms. And I can do a bathroom in under 20 minutes, so I'm just better at it than he is and he doesn't like to do it, so I do that. But I don't like doing laundry. I hate folding laundry. So he will put a load in and fold it every now and then.... He seems to do more of the entering the receipts into the computer because I forget that we have to do that.... There are some things that just naturally fall because of abilities or likes or dislikes, but most of it's just all what we see needs to be done, we do. (Anne)

Although some mothers, such as Deborah and Anne, tend to split tasks with their husbands based on preferences, it seems most mothers still do more of the household work simply because they are at home most of the day and can get a lot of it done. Three mothers said,

Whatever [housework] doesn't get done is ours. And what I can do during the day is mine to do. It's not like I always do this one job and he always does this one job. What we've found, what usually happens, is I do a lot of housework during the day. (Anne)

I don't know if there really is any clear division [of housework]. It's just if I get it done during the day, OK. If I don't and if it's something that can wait, well, it probably will.... I don't ask him to do all that much—unless it *needs* to be done. The pile of dishes on the counter *needs* to be done. (Sally)

I do most of the housework, mostly because I'm there all day. And it's something the boys and I can do. (Kalleen)

Other mothers reported doing more of the household work because they believe it is part of their “job” as stay-at-home mothers.

When we were both working, we probably split the cooking 50/50, and shopping and stuff.... But now [that I stay at home] I do probably almost 100% of the cooking, just because that's my job now. I don't think he thought it had to be that way, though. (Deborah)

[When I worked] we both did a little bit here and there, but now that I'm home I do it more because it's my job now. It's getting done the way it should get done—so she doesn't get diseases left and right. (Adrianna)

Although they do most of the housework, several of these mothers said their husbands are good about “pitching in” to help. Some mothers stated,

[My husband] is pretty good about pitching in. Like there's probably three loads of laundry on the bed upstairs. I mean, he'll fold those and put those away and he'll load the dishwasher and that kind of stuff. (Amber)

And he does the laundry and frequently the vacuuming, because I don't like to vacuum that much so he'll do it. He wants to do the laundry because he feels badly that I do most the rest of the housework. (Kalleen)

If it's something that needs to be done, he's very willing to help pitch in—except for folding laundry. He hates folding laundry. So it will sit in the basket for like 5 days before he will actually do it. (Sally)

However, even though their husbands “pitch in,” many of these mothers often feel frustrated that their spouses do not do more of the household work, as is shown in the following statements:

You feel like you're not only taking care of your child, but your husband's out there at work and when is he going to pick up the load of this? Because, let's face it, it will always be unbalanced when you decide to stay at home. You'll always feel like you're doing the lion's share of the housework. (Adrianna)

Sometimes I'll gripe at my husband that he should do the dishes once in a while. (Kalleen)

[My husband] still has the mentality of a guy who's like, “What? What? You can step over that.” (Sally).

Two mothers specifically expressed frustration that their husbands seem to be willing to help with housework only when they ask them to help.

Now if it comes down to me maybe needing help, and I ask him for help, he'll help, but the problem is that I'm not very good at asking. I mean, it's a personality thing. By nature I'm very nurturing. I like to take care of people and I'm not very good at asking for help, and it is one of my downfalls. And, you know, I expect this dream guy to sense that I need help, you know. (Cassie)

I think he definitely used to—as far as responsibilities—he used to chip in more when he knew I wasn't home. I mean, let's face it, if you were working and you knew that you had a partner at home. I mean, you would expect them to do the things that needed to be done around the house and I think that's only natural. But sometimes I do wish that he would do stuff without my asking him to, like the way it used to be. It used to be more of a shared endeavor and now it's just when I ask him to. So that's something we have to work on. (Adrianna)

It is interesting to note many of the phrases these mothers use to describe the division of household labor. Specifically, phrases such as “I ask him for help,” “pitching in,” and “I don't ask him to do all that much,” seem to indicate that these mothers feel a sense of responsibility or ownership over the

household domain. Much of this may be due to more traditional gender-role attitudes relating to the stay-at-home mother/breadwinner father relationship. Although these mothers report that their husbands do some household work, it seems clear that the mothers continue to feel “in charge” of that aspect of life, largely because they view it as connected to the stay-at-home mothering role.

These mothers not only do the majority of the household work, but they are also the “primary parent,” largely because their children are around them all day and are comfortable with the way they do things. The subsequent comments illustrate this point:

It definitely goes without saying that I’m the primary parent. They come to me before anybody else when anything happens. (Deborah)

When you’re the primary caregiver...the kids automatically come to you even if the other parent’s home. They’ll automatically come to you for all their wants and needs and the emergencies, even if you’re in the middle of something and the other parent’s there. And the other parent will automatically not notice that the children need something because that’s not what they do all day, is notice the children’s needs. So frequently I will have to say, “Dillon, can you do this?” or “Dillon, can you help me?” just to point it out to him what he’s not noticing. And that frustrates me. (Anne)

One mother also mentioned that she is the primary parent largely because her husband simply does not feel comfortable caring for their son. She said,

My husband—I love him dearly. He’s a great daddy. He loves his son very much, but when he first came home he didn’t want to take a lot of that responsibility. I don’t think. He wanted me to do it—take care of him, nurture him—because he thought I knew what I was doing. I was home with him all day, you know. He thought I knew what I was doing, so when it came to him taking care of him, he wasn’t very comfortable. Now that he’s older, he’s more comfortable taking care of him, as long as it’s not taking care of the responsibility. If it’s just watching him and he’s playing, that’s fine, but when it comes to dinner time, bath time, bed time, it’s still my responsibility. (Cassie)

Cassie also added that her husband is beginning to put their son to bed once or twice a month when she needs to leave the house at night; however, the bedtime routine does not always go as smoothly for him because, as Cassie explained, “He’s not used to doing it.... It’s not that he doesn’t want to. I think that neither one of them are used to doing it that way. Brock’s used to mom doing it.” This seems to be representative of many of the full-time stay-at-home mothers’ experiences: they can often more easily decipher what their children want and need because they are with them more hours of the

day. The end result is that these mothers seem to take on more of the child rearing responsibilities. It is also likely that gender-role attitudes influence the division of child rearing responsibilities as well.

Theme 7. Future Desires and Plans

The final area discussed by the full-time stay-at-home mothers involves their plans and desires for the future. Many mothers said they have specific desires, or dreams, about how their life could be better in the near or distant future. For example, many mothers said they want a housekeeper:

It would be nice to be able to pay somebody to do the housework. (Sally)

[I wish I could] have somebody else come in and clean the house and cook my dinner, then I could just focus all my attention with Brock. Wouldn't that be a dream!? (Cassie)

If we could afford it, I'd like to have someone else clean the house so I could really—you know—just have fun crafts-type time with my daughter. (Adrianna)

Other mothers mentioned wanting things like a dishwasher, children that nap at the same time every day, and a stronger ability to organize and develop a routine to manage children and household tasks. Anne said she wishes she could have “a certain, guaranteed amount of sleep every night.”

Most mothers also had some goals for the more distant future. Anne, Kalleen, Cassie, and Sally all either mentioned wanting more children or said they were already pregnant at the time of the interview; each of these four mothers plan to have between three and five children. Deborah, Amber, and Adrianna did not specifically refer to the number of children they plan or hope to have or whether they even plan to have more.

Most of the full-time stay-at-home mothers also said they might work again in the future. For example, Amber said, “I'd like to go back...and be a corporate woman or whatever and do that again, I think.” Adrianna similarly mentioned, “I think I'll probably, God willing, go back to work and find something that I like to do.” However, as the following statements depict, most of these mothers made it clear that they would probably not work until their children were in school, and several also

mentioned they might work only part time so they could continue to have time to spend with their children:

Certainly [I don't want to work] right now. I don't know. When everybody's in school, maybe I'll work part time. (Sally)

I would like to go back to work when they're in school. I don't know if part-time would be good, because I'm just imagining that they'll be busy with school stuff and so I'll want to be able to be involved with that. Because someone once told me that their girls were like 12 and 10 or 12 and 14 or something like that and they were like, "They needed me more than than they did when they were babies." (Amber)

[I told my husband,] "I don't think I want to teach full time. I think I would like to just go into a school and substitute for a while because I can say yes to a job or say no if I want it or not...." Then that way I can still focus—because I know the kids are going to be busy in activities.... (Cassie)

One mother is even considering not returning to work at all because she has heard from other mothers that adolescence is a critical time for parents to be available for their children: she would also like to be at home when her children get off the school bus and to be available to help with her children's activities at school. She said,

I always thought that people who stay at home went back to work when their kids went to school. But this is the first community I've lived in knowing people who didn't—who stayed at home the whole time. And I've talked to moms of older children who think it's more valuable to be at home for them when they're teenagers than even when they're preschoolers. So I've started to change my thinking on that. I think if I go back to work it will depend on if I feel the need to go back to work or not. But I'm not going to take it as a given that I'm going to go back to work when they're in kindergarten or first grade or something.... I'll stay flexible and see what works. I guess. If we can continue to afford me staying at home, we'll see how it goes.... It would be nice to be here when they get home from school... I think that would be nice to be able to get off the bus and say, "Hey, guess what I did at school today, Mom".... I'd like to be one of the moms that can come in when the school class is having a birthday party or a field trip.... (Deborah)

The specific professional or work-related goals of each of the mothers I interviewed include the following: possibly working part time once her children are in school (Sally), taking some classes to refresh herself with "what's out there" in her field of employment and then finding a job—but perhaps not until her daughter is in school (Adrianna), getting a corporate job again once her children are in school (Amber), continuing to be a stay-at-home mother once her children are in school or

possibly working as a CPA again if financially necessary (Deborah), teaching part time or working as a substitute teacher once her children are in school (Cassie), staying home while her children are small and one day teaching religious education and/or maybe home-schooling her children (Kalleen), writing and publishing books and poetry during set hours when her husband is available to watch the children—specifically, after he has finished his schooling (Anne).

In addition to having plans to one day work again, many mothers hope to eventually have more time for hobbies, such as traveling (Kalleen and Adrianna), breeding birds (Kalleen), or gardening (Adrianna). Other goals included having greater financial security (Anne), owning a bigger home (Anne and Cassie), establishing in nice communities wherever their husbands get jobs (Anne and Kalleen), staying in the same community (Deborah), and moving closer to family (Adrianna). One mother had no specific personal goals for the future; she plans to just “wait and see” (Sally).

Finally, many mothers said they have dreams for their children. Specifically, two mothers hoped their children would be successful in education pursuits.

We hope that she decides to further her education, go to college, find a job—a profession—that she loves. (Adrianna)

I’d love my kids to enjoy learning, to enjoy school. I dream about that for them. (Anne)

Two mothers also hoped that their children would grow up to be happy and achieve their personal potential:

I just want them to grow up and be happy and do whatever they want to do. (Sally)

I just want her to be happy and be satisfied with who she is and realize that she is an incredible person and capable of a lot of wonderful things. (Adrianna)

CHAPTER 6: COMPOSITE DESCRIPTION OF THE PHENOMENON OF PART-TIME STAY-AT-HOME MOTHERING

Similar to the previous chapter, which examined the phenomenon of full-time stay-at-home mothering, this chapter provides the reader with a composite description of the lived experiences of the part-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed. Many of the themes discussed by the part-time stay-at-home mothers are similar to those discussed by the full-time group; however, some important differences also exist between the two groups. These themes and related sub-themes are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Themes and sub-themes outlining the phenomenon of part-time stay-at-home mothering

- Theme 1. Reasons for Being a Part-Time Stay-At-Home Mother/Working Part Time**
 - Top Priority is the Family and Mothering
 - Combining Mothering and Working Full Time Can Be Stressful and Exhausting
 - Financial Evaluation/Income from Working Part Time is a Necessity
 - Need for Social Contact
 - Theme 2. Perceived Positives of Part-Time Stay-At-Home Mothering**
 - Rewards of Mothering: Love, Fun, and Play
 - "Best of Both Worlds": Adult Interaction and Time With Children
 - Greater Flexibility With Time and Reduced Stress
 - Support from Family and Friends
 - Theme 3. Perceived Challenges of Part-Time Stay-At-Home Mothering**
 - Balancing Working and Mothering
 - Children's Misbehavior
 - Lower Income and Fewer Employment Benefits
 - Theme 4. Child Care**
 - Guilt, Concern, and Sadness of Leaving Children
 - Social and Educational Benefits for Children
 - Finding the Right Child Care Provider
 - Theme 5. "Good" Mothering**
 - The Ideal Mother
 - Admiration for Role Models
 - Personal Evaluation of Self and Child
 - Theme 6: The Marriage Relationship and Division of Household Labor/Child Rearing**
 - The Marriage Relationship
 - Why Moms—Not Dads—Stay at Home Part Time: Finances and Preferences
 - Division of Household Labor and Child Rearing Responsibilities
 - Theme 7. Future Desires and Plans**
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Theme 1. Reasons for Being a Part-Time Stay-At-Home Mother/Working Part-Time

All of the part-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed worked full time prior to reducing their hours to part-time. Now, all of these mothers work between 15 and 25 hours weekly. For some of these mothers, the decision to work part time occurred after they already had a child and had attempted to balance mothering and working full time ($n = 4$); others decided to cut back to part-time when they were pregnant or directly after the birth of their first child ($n = 3$). The child care arrangements of the four mothers who had worked full time after they had a child were diverse, ranging from full-time center care, to full-time in-home care, to working a night shift so that the spouse could care for the child.

Switching from full-time to part-time happened in different ways for each mother. For example, Meredith decided working full time was too exhausting and wanted to cut back to part-time, but the management at her work would only allow her to continue working full time. Meredith was just about to quit working altogether; however, she happened to hear about another part-time job in a different department at the same place of employment, which she promptly took and continues to hold today. Drea, in contrast, who was also working full time, found another mother who wanted to switch from working full time to part time. The two of them presented a job-sharing plan to their boss, which was accepted. As the individual descriptions in Chapter 4 showed, each mother has a different story relating to her change from full-time to part-time work.

Several factors influenced each mother's decision to reduce their hours from full-time to part-time. First, like the full-time stay-at-home mothers, each of the part-time stay-at-home mothers listed their family or mothering as a top priority in their lives. Second, similar to the full-time stay-at-home mothers, the part-time stay-at-home mothers reported that working full time left them stressed and exhausted and also provided them with little flexibility in the time they spent with their children. In contrast to the full-time stay-at-home mothers, however, the part-time stay-at-home mothers felt they could not afford to stop working completely and that they needed some income in order to live

comfortably. These three reasons for becoming part-time stay-at-home mothers/work part time are discussed in greater detail as follows.

Top Priority Is the Family and Mothering

The main factor influencing each part-time stay-at-home mother's decision to cut back from full-time to part-time was a desire to spend more time with their children. For example, Drea, who worked full time for the first 4 months of her son's life, explained that the primary reason she stopped working full time "...was just basically missing him." Carol, on the other hand, always planned to work part time once she had children. She said, "When I went to school I just always hoped I could work part time and then be half time with the kids. Yeah, it was always a goal...." This desire to work part time in order to have more time with their children is related to the fact that each of these mothers listed their family or their children as their top priority or as their second priority next only to God or self. The following statements provide evidence of the importance of family and mothering to each of these mothers:

Being a mother is really important to me and that's why I've made the choices that I've made. But as far as referring to myself as a specific "thing," I think that I call myself a mom before anything. (Drea)

[My] life priorities: probably family is top.... Work is pretty low on the agenda. (Patricia)

[I] put my faith first. And, well, my faith and my family first. [I] put my career last. And then all the other stuff in between, I guess. (Lori)

And I feel really good about being a full-time parent—because I really do, even though she goes to [daycare], I consider myself a full-time parent because that's the priority in my life.... I think that making myself happy is [my] number one [priority], but I can't do that without doing other things, which would be like making Jasmine happy. or just giving her a solid foundation. (Jacqui)

My life priorities: I would like to have God as the center of our home, first of all. And then my second priority would be to my husband and to my kids. (Meredith)

Family always comes first....We just plan our life out around what would be good for them. (Carol)

Two mothers particularly said the chief reason they cut back to part-time was a desire to place their children first in their lives and to let their children know they are important to them. They said,

When [my daughter and husband] used to drop me off [at work] she used to cry and say, "Mommy, don't go!" And then one day, she didn't cry anymore! She just wouldn't even look at me. So, I was like.... "I have to do something! I can't keep doing this!" She didn't care anymore. It hurt her feelings so bad. And I think that it was the next week that I decided to quit. It was just like, "I cannot keep doing this. I mean, I want to be a parent more than anything else." (Jacqui)

I always want to be able to sit down and spend time with Mason and really give him my attention.... That's why I cut back to part-time because we don't want to be too hectic all the time. I want that down time with the kids. (Carol)

Some of the part-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed also mentioned that although money was a priority in their lives, family and mothering come well before money on their list of priorities:

I may talk about, yeah, all the great and wonderful things I could have—the choices with money and all those things and even some material things, but ultimately it does not at all compare to being a parent. (Lori)

To me, money is important. I think money allows you a certain type of freedom: like the freedom to travel or the freedom to not have to worry about how you're going to pay for stuff. I think it's important in those aspects, but I think you have to come to an understanding about what you're going to give up and what you're not. And I think that's what we've done. [Our daughter is] never going to be two again.... And I think that in looking to raise a really healthy, happy child, that it's so important that we have a strong base at home.... I will never regret staying home with her. I really don't think I will. Whereas if we were making other decisions, I might. (Jacqui)

Other priorities of some of these part-time stay-at-home mothers included having jobs they enjoy, nurturing relationships with extended family and friends, and creating a pleasant home life, as is illustrated in the following comments:

I don't think that I could stay home with my daughter 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And I don't think that that would be good for her or me.... And I always have had career aspirations and I don't want to devote my life to my child, you know, 100%. I know I wouldn't be happy if I were here with her all the time, and therefore I know that she wouldn't be happy. So it's worked out the best for us to be able to find that balance. (Jacqui)

I could never do a job that I hated or that I was just going to [in order] to put food on the table....so I need to have some sort of work that I can at least enjoy, but it's definitely not ranked up there very high. (Patricia)

[For my priorities] Mom and wife are one and two, and of course, just being a sister and daughter and all that to my mom and dad and sister, of course that's very important. But I would say, because of this particular job I have, I feel my role of what I am at work is very important to me right now just because I love it and have so many great friends there.... I have zillions of friends and I love it! (Drea)

I guess I was always looking forward to when I could cut back and just have more time to create a home. You know, to have more of a home life. Even if I didn't have kids, to cook some meals, to do things to make it cozy—because my mom always stayed home just to have more of a traditional family style. (Carol)

Combining Mothering and Working Full Time Can Be Stressful and Exhausting

Another reason several of these mothers chose to work part-time was because of the stress and exhaustion they experienced while working full time. Phrases such as “really, really hard,” or “pooped everyday,” located in the following statements, portray the difficulties these mothers faced when they combined mothering with working full time:

It was really, really hard when I was working a swing shift [full-time night shift] with Ally because I would stay at home with her all day and then when my husband would come home I would go to work all night. It was really hard. (Stacey)

I wouldn't have the energy [to work full time]. I did work full time for like 3 weeks when I went back to work [after my maternity leave] until I got the nerve up to say, “OK, I'm going to work part time or quit.” I was pooped everyday, because having a C-section, nursing—I was wiped out. (Meredith)

[When I worked full time] we lived 10 miles from my job and it took me an hour [to commute] each way. It was insane! I was scheduled for an 8-hour shift and then an hour for lunch. That's 9 hours, and then two hours of driving. So I was gone 11 hours every day. I just couldn't do it anymore! (Jacqui)

Well, [before we had kids] we both worked full time. And just pretty much working is your main thing. I mean, working dictated your free time. (Carol)

Financial Evaluation/Income From Working Part Time Is a Necessity

Most of the part-time stay-at-home mothers also indicated that while they do not want to work full time, they need the extra income from working part time to supplement their husbands' income. The following passages suggest that these mothers consider the income from their part-time jobs as a “necessity.”

Work as a whole is nice and it's a necessity because it puts food on the table and everything else. (Patricia)

If I didn't work at all—I mean, we're strapped now. We have to have my little amount of income that I do work. It's a necessity. (Drea)

Sometimes you wonder if it's worth it at all [to work part time]. But then if you look at—we can't do without the paycheck. (Stacey)

We were kind of just at the end, with him going to school. He does work study, and I'd saved up money when I'd quit working at [my full-time] store managing job. But after 3 or 4 months, we were out of cash! That was the end of it. And it was the holidays, too. So I just took this job. (Jacqui)

While one mother did not exactly suggest working was a complete necessity, she said that she and her husband wanted to have a budget that was flexible enough that they could afford to eat out and do fun things. She explained,

Well, originally I wouldn't have had to work, but the summer Carson was born we decided to go ahead and buy a minivan. We could have made it but we would have had to scrimp a little more, and neither Paul nor I felt like we wanted to be constantly asking ourselves if we could afford to go out to eat or buy something. So basically my paycheck covered my mom's babysitting and the van payment, and our little pleasure. We could go out to eat when we wanted to. It was important to us. (Meredith)

Meredith also appreciates the security of knowing that if her husband ever lost his job, she would not have to "break ground and go out and try to find a new job," but her income could sustain their family for a short time.

Several mothers described the assessment they made of their personal financial situations as they were making the decision to reduce their hours from full-time to part-time. As the following statements indicate, after calculating the costs of child care and working, as well as determining ways in which budgets could be reduced to compensate for the lower income of working part time, many mothers concluded working part time would be financially feasible:

...I did the numbers in my head. It's amazing! Say you cut your hours in half. Your pay doesn't cut down because you're saving money on this, that, and the other [by] not going to work [5 days a week]: not going out to eat, not buying clothes, not having to drive, not having to pay your babysitter. So you almost only lose about one fourth of your income. It's like, "You know, we can make do. We'll cancel the cable, cancel the cell phone and that type of thing." And it worked out well. (Drea)

You kind of have to weigh making the money versus the daycare, because you have to subtract whatever you make—you have to subtract out the daycare costs. (Stacey)

Another mother simply chose to work part time because she found that she could make more money working part time as a home-based cosmetic sales consultant rather than teaching full time. She said,

I decided that I wanted to pursue [selling cosmetics] further because it was going to bring in more money than teaching, and that's pretty much what it came down to.... [I decided] I'll just stay home and rely on that income and, you know, do that. (Lori)

Finally, it is interesting to note that one mother found it was not cost effective for her to work full time because child care was so expensive; however she still wanted to get out of the house a little. After evaluating her finances, she determined the best way for her to have time away from home was to work part time, because at least that way she would have the income to cover the costs of child care. She said,

...a lot of [my working] is a financial thing. Basically right now my salary goes to pay child care... After I had Laura my husband wanted me to stay at home because we wanted to have me here with the kids when they were little and because it wasn't cost effective for me to work. And I was happy to do that, but I found I needed to get out of the house a little bit, and at least me working was bringing in some money, at least. Because I could have, you know, volunteered or done something like that, but I still would have had to find a babysitter for the kids, and at least working was a way to make it balance. (Patricia)

Need for Social Contact

Another reason many of the part-time stay-at-home mothers decided to work part time, rather than stay at home full time, is for the social contact they would gain through working. The subsequent remarks illustrate this point:

I have to be doing something. I have to do something besides being stuck inside the home. So [working part time is] a good opportunity for me to do it, but still be able to spend time with my family. (Jacqui)

[Working part time is] perfect for me because I was not ready to stay at home.... While on maternity leave with Carson, I was content to sit and watch TV or read a book. I needed some reason to get up and get ready for the day. Also, I just needed adult interaction. (Meredith)

There [were] days, like when I was on maternity leave, I was like, "Oh, I need out of here!" You know, I need some contact. (Carol)

I love my kids to death, but if I had to be here 7 days a week with them, 24 hours a day. I think I would go insane, and that's not doing them any good, either. So [working] gives me a little respite, too, for me to get out of the house and do something else that I feel is productive. (Patricia)

Several fascinating phrases depict the ideology these mothers have about being a full-time stay-at-home mother. These include: "stuck inside the home," "not ready to stay at home." "I need out of here," or "I would go insane." Clearly many of these part-time stay-at-home mothers believe that staying home full time would be too isolating, which is, interestingly enough, one of the perceived challenges listed by several of the stay-at-home mothers.

Theme 2. Perceived Positives of Part-Time Stay-At-Home Mothering

Each of the part-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed listed several advantages, or positives, associated with being a mother who works part time. These included the rewards of mothering, such as having fun with their children; having the "best of both worlds," or time to be with their children, as well as to interact with other adults; greater flexibility with time and reduced stress as a result of decreasing their hours from full-time to part-time; and receiving support from family and friends.

Rewards of Mothering: Love, Fun, and Play

Being a mother is an important and rewarding role for all of the part-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed. One mother simply stated, "I love being a mom. I wouldn't give it back for anything" (Lori). These mothers greatly appreciate their opportunity to spend more time with their children as a result of working part time rather than full time because they get to experience many of the loving, funny, and playful moments that they feel naturally occur when one is with children. The following passages provide examples of some of the rewarding experiences many of these part-time mothers experience on a daily basis:

She'll do this thing where she'll put her arms around both our necks and she'll say, "These are my parents." It's just the sweetest thing when she puts her arms around me or says, "Mommy, I love you." That stuff is so rewarding. (Jacqui)

[One of my favorite things is] probably cuddle time, which happens whenever. Laura and I sat down this morning. I had my coffee and a slice of toast and she sat in my lap.... You've got to enjoy those times while they offer them. (Patricia)

I love watching [my son] figure things out. He always sticks to things until he figures stuff out....I love watching him learn and discovering things, and I love getting hugs and kisses and, you know, when he says things without being prompted, it's rewarding, especially if it's, "Thank you, Mommy," or "No thank you, Mommy," or little things like that. (Meredith)

She's so clever. I could talk about her all day. Last night she was laying on the bed and Adam was reading her a story. And I came in to say goodnight and she sits up and goes, "Honey, what you doing?" And I just said, "Well, honey, I'm going to say goodnight." I love it when she uses terms of endearment. She'll call me "sweetie"... She calls me "Mommy-baby," because I'll call her "Jasmine-baby" and she'll call me "Mommy-baby." (Jacqui)

Just listening to him—he is a crack-up. Some of the stuff they come up with—it just amazes you. Or, you know, you'll be watching them play and you just think, "How can he do that? He can do that, and he can get his own water." Sometimes it just strikes you.... I love just to sit and talk to him and hear his take on thing. His new thing is being a backseat driver. "Mom, there's a red light. Slow down. Don't crash the car. Green. Now go! Go Mom!" If I don't go fast enough, it's like, "Oh boy, I've created a monster!" (Drea)

Patricia mentioned particularly appreciating the opportunity she has to witness the milestones in her children's lives. She said,

You get to see the important things that happen in your kids' lives [when you work part time]. You know, them walking and making those huge milestones, and talking, and helping them through all of that. I think that the biggest benefit is just being with them and having them. (Patricia)

Finally, two mothers described simply enjoying the time they have to do playful, child-centered activities with their children, such as going to the park or the library. They said,

I really like going to the park with Jasmine, or Jasmine and friends. Or maybe go walking in the woods. (Jacqui)

Probably [my favorite thing is] going to the park. We like going to the park. And she likes going to the library. We sit in the big rocking chair there and read books for a while. (Stacey)

Clearly these part-time stay-at-home mothers, like the full-time stay-at-home mothers, thoroughly enjoy interacting with their children.

"The Best of Both Worlds": Adult Interaction and Time With Children

Another perceived positive of the part-time stay-at-home mothering role is having both time to spend with children and time to interact with adults. Two mothers specifically used the phrase, "the best of both worlds," to describe this particular benefit of working part time.

It's the best of both worlds. Every mother, I wish, was able to do that. I couldn't stay home full time because I'd go stir-crazy. I need to get out of the house. I need to go to work. I need to contribute to the bills and what not personally. But I don't want to be there all the time. 5 days a week, and having my babysitter raise my kid either. It's so great. (Drea)

It's nice because you kind of get the best of both worlds. You get to spend extra time with your kids and you still get to get out and have adult interaction. (Patricia)

Other mothers added,

I like the adult interaction the most probably. And the fact that I can get out of the house for a few days, but I'm still able to have 4 days where I'm having an influence on [my son]. (Meredith)

But as far as working, I think I'm happier to get out of the house, too. It's kind of a catch-22. I like staying home with Ally, but I also like getting out some and interacting with adults. You kind of want to do both, which is kind of what part-time is, I guess. (Stacey)

[Working] gets me out of the house so I won't get cranky. Sometimes when I have 4 days off in a row, by the next day I'm like, "I am just so ready to leave and go to work and get out of here." ...Every mother should be able [to work part time], because you get out of the house. You have your friends outside the home at work, so you get invited to functions that are work-related, which is good. I mean, you need to have your friends and then your social outings. When you're home part time you have time to get your house cleaned up and your dentist appointments in, soccer and all that kind of stuff when it comes up. (Drea)

Drea provided a passionate description of just how important her interaction with her co-workers is.

She said,

I love my job!... I love everybody I work with—I just *love* them and I've become really close to them. So it's like—I don't care if I'm only making piddly. It's a blast!... I have zillions of friends and I love it! (Drea)

In addition to having adult contact, many of the mothers I interviewed find part-time employment personally satisfying for several other reasons. As the subsequent passages show, other rewards include the feeling of making a difference in others' lives, being mentally stimulated, and simply loving one's job as a whole:

[Working] makes me feel like I'm having an impact still on somebody else's life outside of ours—and hopefully a positive impact.... (Patricia)

I just need to stimulate my brain, I guess, and I like to learn different things. (Drea)

With me, I love what I do. I totally love [selling cosmetics]. I have so much fun. It's positive. I have a reason to talk to people. I make great money. I'm able to be at home. The list goes on and on and on and on and on. I get prizes. I get rewarded. I have great friends from it. The benefits to me are endless. Why aren't you in it? Just teasing! (Lori)

Not only did many mothers describe part-time employment as personally beneficial, but one mother also said that her employment is beneficial for her children and her employer because mothering and working each provide her with a break from the other and help her stay fresh for each role. She said,

I really like [being a mother who works part time]. Having both of them makes you appreciate the other one.... I just believe I'm fresher at my job when I am there.... I think it helps [my children] because it keeps me stimulated and energized as far as—it makes me use my brain. And then when I am with them I appreciate it more.... At work you rest from the home things, and at home you rest from the work things. (Carol)

Greater Flexibility With Time and Reduced Stress

These mothers also enjoy the increased flexibility and reduced stress that accompany working part time rather than full time. In the following passages several mothers specifically mention having more time to spend with their children, spouses and extended families:

Now [that we both quit our full-time jobs] we're more domestically oriented. Typically we're able to do stuff in the middle of the afternoon or something. We're able to go swimming or go for a walk in the park or something like that, which we never, ever could do before. Because even when we had days off, we were busy doing all the maintenance stuff for life, you know.... Time is such a luxury! (Jacqui)

Yeah. [my husband and I] get to see each other more, because he comes home for lunch, so on the days that the kids and I are here we all have lunch together. So that's an added bonus, I think. Um, I mean, you have more family time, even if, you know, it's just an hour.... (Patricia)

My relationship with friends has been better because of [working part time], just because of the simple fact that I have more time to devote to people.... We have been able to spend so much more time with [my family]. And they love being able to play with Jasmine. They absolutely love it! (Jacqui)

Some mothers also enjoy the fact that their kids enjoy greater flexibility with their time, as well, particularly on the days when their mothers are not working. One mother said,

I just like the fact that the kids can sleep in [on my days off]. We're just not really on much of a schedule.... It's fun to have days where you have a little activity planned—just that's focused around the kids. (Carol)

The increase in flexibility that accompanies a part-time job also carries over to the workplace, according to several mothers, because they can enjoy more accommodating work schedules.

I guess my job gives me the flexibility to pick when I want to work... and I can change my schedule whenever I want. (Patricia)

My job's really pretty flexible. I mean, my boss has been really good to let me change the days I'm working.... If you have something going on, work isn't always the priority. I don't take it home. It's there. I go there, I do it. I come home, and it's done. (Meredith)

At least I get to spend some time with [my daughter]. And it's a little bit more flexible. I can get off work more often than some of the full-time workers.... And I also have time off during the winter time. During winter break and spring break a lot of the full-time workers have to work and I get time off. (Stacey)

Lori, who works selling and delivering cosmetics approximately 10 hours weekly from home and 10 hours outside of her home, described the extreme flexibility she enjoys with her particular job, saying,

I think I'm spoiled and lucky that I'm fortunate enough to be able to be home with my son. That's always been a goal of mine in life. So I think it's pretty nice. Plus, I'm in control of my own hours so I work when I want and that's nice.... I don't have stress. I don't have the negativity that comes with the daily rat-race of people working 8 to 5. I don't have to get up early and get ready everyday.... I don't have to feel rushed. I don't have to follow a schedule. (Lori)

Another mother enjoys how extremely family-friendly her job is. Not only can she bring her daughter to meetings, but only 4 of the hours she works occur at a set time, which allows her to basically schedule her work around her daughter's needs. She explained,

Well, one thing I like about this job... is that it's pretty family-friendly. A lot of people will bring their kids to meetings and stuff like that.... And the hours are very flexible. I only work 4 hours in the office and then everything else is appointments that I set up with people on my own time. So this job is perfect! (Jacqui)

The flexibility of having a part-time work schedule also gives many of these mothers more free time. For example, Lori explained, "I'm so flexible with my schedule that I can have free time

whenever I want. This morning, for example, I woke up and I decided to sit down and read my book for half an hour.” Interestingly, however, even though many of these mothers have more flexible schedules as a result of working part time rather than full time, many of them spend much of their “free time” with their children or doing household tasks, which was also the case among the full-time group. Some of the part-time stay-at-home mothers said,

[In my free time I] play with Ally. A lot of times we’ll go out and play in the garden. We like to go to the park. Go swimming. A lot of times in my free time I end up cleaning, too. But I’ll wait until she takes a nap because we get little time together. Then on the weekends we try to do something together—going camping this next weekend—try to do some sort of a family outing. (Stacey)

Free time isn’t really free time when you’re a mom! [In my free time I] clean or [do] laundry or right now we’ve got lots of little projects going on. We just got a new whirlpool tub upstairs so in my free time I’ve been painting and sanding and doing stuff for upstairs. (Patricia)

In their *truly* free moments, when their housework is finished and their children are content, sleeping, or with their dads, for example, these mothers enjoy doing a variety of activities, including scrap-booking, reading, going out to eat with friends, or doing crafts or decorating projects:

Once a month my girlfriends and I have a girls’ night out. It’s like the third Saturday of every month. [My husband] just knows that he needs to plan on not doing anything and that he’s in charge of the kids that night. (Patricia)

For me when I have free time, it’s spending time with [my son] or doing some things for myself, like going shopping, or just going to look—not necessarily going to spend money, going to get my nails done. Stuff like that. (Lori)

Here at home most of the time I’ve always got some craft project going down in the basement, or I paint rooms. I just did the bathroom the other day.... It’s probably my main side thing that I do when I’m home. (Drea)

I like to read, so I read a lot, so when I do have even 10 minutes I might pull out a book and read a chapter or so in the book. I read a lot after the kids go to bed. (Patricia)

Finally, in addition to having greater flexibility with their time, these mothers described experiencing a reduction in their stress level, as well as their husbands’ stress level, when they switched from working full time to part time:

The swing shift that we did earlier was really, really hard. And we couldn't take it.... Now is a lot better-a lot better! We couldn't handle not seeing each other and spending time together. We have a really good relationship so it was just hard not seeing each other. We'd see each other in passing. One would be coming and the other would be going. (Stacey)

I would say that overall things probably got less stressful [when I switched to part-time].... Things got less stressful and more relaxed, and, um, calmer, more organized, even though you added an extra kid—at that time. (Patricia)

It seems like I was happier [when I started working part time], I know, which reflects directly on your spouse, because if you're crabby, they're crabby. You know, "If mom ain't happy, ain't nobody happy," that saying? Um, so that was good. Plus [my husband] got spoiled rotten on the days I was off: come home and dinner would be ready. (Drea)

Clearly increased flexibility with time and reduced stress are positive aspects associated with part-time stay-at-home mothering.

Support From Family and Friends

The majority of the part-time stay-at-home mothers mentioned feeling that most of their families and friends are supportive of their part-time stay-at-home mothering role. Some of these mothers suggested their parents are supportive largely because they are relieved their grandchildren get to see their mothers more. Two mothers explained,

...I think that we've gotten a lot of support, especially my family. Both my parents are really glad that I was able to quit working so much.... I think that they respect me and Adam both for making decisions that are good for Jasmine. (Jacqui)

Both my sisters work part time, so it's just kind of the norm in my family, as far as the moms go.... And my mom likes the thought that all her grandkids get to be home, you know, that they're not stuck at babysitters all the time. That makes her happy. (Drea)

Another mother believes her family and her husband's family are supportive of her part-time employment largely because most of the women in their families also work part time or wish they could work part time. She said,

I get a lot of support. Rob's family, they all think it's great. His parents are passed away, but his sisters, they wish they could stay home full time, so they're glad to see that somebody can stay home part time.... And my family, my sister does the same thing I do, so my family's used to it and they think it's great. (Carol)

Carol also said many of her friends also work part time, so they understand what it is like to work part time and think she is lucky to be able to do it. She explained,

Like my one friend, she just cut back [to part-time], and she's real excited to be able to cut back a few hours. They think it's great. I think everyone thinks I'm lucky. Nobody thinks bad of me, like, "Oh, you're not full time anymore?" (Carol)

Meredith similarly explained. "My mom worked while I was growing up.... She thinks that it's fine. And I think most of my friends—even the ones that have chosen to stay home—have an understanding" (Meredith).

Although most mothers said the majority of their families and friends support and encourage them to work part time, it must be noted that a couple of mothers described feeling judged by a few members of their families for working part time rather than staying home full time. For example, Meredith said "I would say that my mother-in-law wishes that I would stay home [full time]." Patricia similarly said,

I think that some of our family—the family members who stay home, the moms and some of our families that do stay home full time—think that that's what I should do. Basically because it's not bringing us any money for me to go out and work so why don't I just stay home and be with my kids full time and that should be enough. (Patricia)

Interestingly, Stacey reported experiencing pressure from various relatives to do everything except work part time. She explained,

My husband's parents—since Richard's mother had to work—she thinks [my working is] fine. She realizes we need the money. In fact, I think she'd like me to work more. But she also realizes that we don't like to take her to daycare and everything. And Richard's aunt, who's the child psychologist, thinks that daycare is just the worst thing ever invented and that no kids should go to daycare.... And my parents don't want me to work at all, either. They think that I should stay home like my mom did. They think that Richard should get a better job.... Like I said, [Richard's parents] want me to work more, my parents want me to work less, and Richard's aunt somehow doesn't want me to take her to daycare at all. (Stacey)

Despite a few instances of pressure to stop working part time, most of these mothers do feel supported and encouraged in their mothering/working roles by their friends and family. It is interesting to note that although many mothers from the full-time group frequently mentioned feeling judged or rated as "second-class" by others because they were "just" stay-at-home mothers, the part-

time stay-at-home mothers rarely discussed any sense of a social stigma or negative judgment associated with working part time.

Theme 3. Perceived Challenges of Part-Time Stay-At-Home Mothering

The part-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed also mentioned three main challenges that they believe accompany their role. These are balancing the demands of working and mothering, trying to patiently handle children's moments of misbehavior, and having a lower income and fewer employment benefits, such as insurance benefits or vacation time.

Balancing Working and Mothering

Balancing the dual demands of motherhood and employment is one perceived challenge discussed by several of these part-time stay-at-home mothers. One mother talked about the "give and take" of balancing her time between her family and her career. She said,

I think that there's challenges between balancing things. That's, to me, the key to a happy life.... It's always give and take and I'm always trying to find a happy medium between spending time with family and still having a career. (Jacqui)

Another mother similarly talked about feeling "torn" between working and mothering. In this passages she describes feeling she isn't "really good at anything" because she feels unable to do either her mothering or her working roles well. She said,

You feel you're like not fully into either one. You feel guilty for your kids because you're leaving them and feel like you can never do enough, and then with work it's like you're not "gung-ho," fully doing everything you could do at work, [like] starting programs or really being a corporate ladder-climber type person.... I can see it as that old cliché, you know. You just feel like you aren't really good at anything. You feel really kind of torn.... That's what you worry about: you can't do anything right, you know, perfect. You're not doing anything all the way. You're not a full-time mom and you're not a full-time worker. But, um, I think it works. For me, it works best this way. (Carol)

Other challenges related to balancing the work and mothering roles are connected to scheduling work time and child care. Meredith talked about the challenge of setting up her work schedule, particularly when her regular babysitter—her mother in this case—is unable to watch her son. She said,

Sometimes the challenge is to get your schedule set up, especially like next week when my mom's going to be gone on vacation [and won't be able to watch Carson]. It would be nice if I could take the whole week off, but I'm trying to save my leave up for my next maternity leave. (Meredith)

Carol similarly said it is particularly difficult to be an employed mother because "if the kids are sick you have to leave work."

Another challenge related to balancing working and mothering is simply getting children ready each workday and taking them to their child care providers. One mother described the morning "rush" that occurs on the days she works:

Well, when I work it's a lot more stressful. So if I have to be to work and take the kids in, that's like the worst end of the opposite ends of the spectrum.... It's like rush, rush, you know—try to get all my bags packed up because I'm pumping [milk], so I have to put the coolers in and bottles and stuff.... You have to be so organized. I have most of it ready the night before: your lunch, the kids' snacks for after you pick them up, and all that stuff ready to go. Then I jump in the shower and hopefully I can do all that before Bryant wakes up or before Jocelyn has to eat again or before she starts getting fussy. Once I get all that done, I get the kids. Hopefully Bryant wakes up in a good mood. I get him dressed and in the car and then go. Then the rest of the day's easy. (Carol)

Lori, who works half of her weekly hours at home, does not struggle with getting her child to a babysitter; instead, the main challenge she faces in regards to balancing working and mothering is when her son does not nap as planned, taking away some of her work time. She explained,

Probably what's challenging is when... I'm used to him really being good and taking a little nap and doing those things, and when he doesn't do it and I'm expecting that and I don't get things done, that's what's hard for me. Then I can stress out and, "Ah, shoot. I was going to get that done!" (Lori)

Children's Misbehavior

Like the full-time stay-at-home mothers, one challenge many of the part-time stay-at-home mothers described facing is dealing with their children's misbehavior. One mother said,

There's some nights, some days, that are really challenging, and then that's when you get your fingers out and you count, "How many years is it until they can stay home by themselves and we can go out and have a quiet dinner and not have to worry...?" (Patricia)

Jacqui also mentioned having moments when she is frustrated with her daughter and just needs a break. She said, "I get frustrated [with my daughter] all the time. But usually if I get frustrated, I just

walk away.” Several mothers specifically described the difficulty of handling an active and sometimes stubborn toddler or preschooler, as is illustrated in these passages:

I’m pretty patient, but sometimes it’s hard to know—being that he’s two. You ask him to do something [and he says], “No!” and you expect that from a 2-year-old, but it’s just knowing when to push him and when to get more stern, more strict. So kind of the discipline thing—just keeping him entertained. (Carol)

But she’s also a 2-year-old! You know? So she does a really good job of being a toddler sometimes.... [She’ll] throw her food on the floor and write on the walls and, you know, refuse to get dressed. (Jacqui)

I’m going through a lot of testing right now, I would say, because he’s two and getting a lot more independent and just learning how to change his mindset when he’s stuck on something is hard. (Meredith)

[My son] has no patience. He is at that age anyway that everything is a challenge as far as I’m concerned. Three is not my favorite age so far, I can tell you that. And you can write that down. He’s just very impatient. You know, I’ll be talking to somebody on the phone and if he wants you, he wants you right then. He’ll just go, “Mom, Mom, Mom, Mom,” until he just about drives you crazy. And he’s in that testing us stage. You know, “Go do this Wade,” and he just stands there, you know, until you’re about so red in the face. It’s just his age. He’s just really learning how to test the limits and talk back. (Drea)

Other child rearing challenges some of these part-time stay-at-home mothers mentioned facing include trying to give their children equal attention, deciphering what their children need to make them happy during a fussy or difficult moment, trying to not expect more of their children than is appropriate for their ages, and not taking stress from work out on their children. These points are demonstrated in the succeeding comments:

I feel bad because I’m always having to hold [my 6-month-old daughter]. She gets everything she needs right away, and...I have to put [my son] off a little bit. But he doesn’t seem to notice too much. Those are the challenges: making them both feel like they’re getting equal attention. (Carol)

That was challenging for me and is challenging for me, is figuring out what [my son’s] needs are. When something’s wrong and you can’t help them, you kind of freak out a little bit, “Oh my gosh! What’s wrong?” (Lori)

[One challenge is] remembering that they’re little, because sometimes you tend to forget that. Even though Andrew is 5, you think he should be able to get himself dressed every morning without asking for help, but he’s only 5. So, and remembering that when you have a bad day at work you don’t need to bring it home with you and take it out on them. (Patricia)

Lower Income and Fewer Employment Benefits

A final perceived challenge of working part time, according to most of the part-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed, is having fewer employment benefits, like insurance or vacation leave, and, in Carol's words, "making less money." These disadvantages are listed in the following comments:

You get no benefits. You don't get any sick pay. I don't get any vacation.... You don't get holiday pay and stuff. If you're sick, you're [out of luck]—if your kid's sick. Luckily my husband has decent insurance, but if I had to actually pay for my own benefits through my part-time job, they'd skyrocket. (Drea)

You don't earn leave as fast [with a part-time job]. (Meredith)

As far as [working part time] is concerned, I don't get seniority. I don't get health benefits. Basically it's the downfall of being a part-time worker. So I don't get much of that. I don't get paid as much as if I worked full time. So sometimes you wonder if it's worth it at all.... If I worked full time I'd move up quicker and I'd get the better hours and the better pay and I'd get the health benefits, which I don't have. (Stacey)

Our income is one seventh of what it was 2 years ago, which is just crazy! I look back now and I'm like, "What did I spend all that money on?" Because to me now, the amount of money that I was making before seems like a windfall!... [When we were both working full time] we were getting to the point where we were getting ready to hire a maid, which sounds very nice even now. I wish I could afford it now. (Jacqui)

Theme 4. Child Care

Since each of these part-time stay-at-home mothers works outside her home at least for a portion of the week and cannot take their children with them when they work, they all talked substantially about child care. In particular, three main areas relating to child care were discussed: feelings of guilt, concern, and sadness related to leaving one's child with a child care provider or at a daycare center, the social and education benefits children received through attending daycare, and perceptions about which type of child care is the best. Each of these sub-themes is discussed and passages from the interviews help to portray how these mothers feel about the child care her child or children receive.

Guilt, Concern, and Sadness of Leaving Children

Many mothers described feeling guilty, worried, or sad about leaving their children at daycare or with a babysitter. Two mothers said,

Ally was happy [when] one of us was always home, but now that we take her to the babysitter we feel very guilty and sad when we drop her off. (Stacey)

Bryant's old enough where he always, "I want to stay home. Mommy, home." So I kind of feel guilty about it. (Carol)

Much of the guilt these mothers face when leaving their children at daycare occurs because their children often do not want to attend daycare. Some mothers explained,

If I have to take her to the babysitter, that's definitely challenging. She just looks sad.... When we drop her off she just kind of holds her blankie and kind of looks back at us and just kind of stands there.... Neither one of us likes to [drop her off]. I've been making my husband do it lately, but I've dropped her off, too.... She doesn't like to go, and some days she'll say that she doesn't want to go at all. (Stacey)

Sometimes they don't want to go to daycare and that makes me sad because I still have to take them, and on those days it's like, "OK, maybe I should just stay home because it's not like we're making any money." So there's the guilt, I guess, of still working part time when I don't really have to. (Patricia)

I wonder sometimes if Bryant doesn't kind of have a knot in his stomach when he goes to bed thinking, "I wonder if I have to go to school today." Or like when I tell him, "Tomorrow we're going to get up and go to school," and he still cries when I take him. So I—kind of in the back of my mind—I think, "Oh, I hope he's not feeling depressed and kind of dreading it now." So I kind of feel bad about that. (Carol)

Stacey also described simply feeling sad that she is "missing out" on her daughter's daily experiences. She said,

I always feel sad when I can tell she's picking up some of the babysitter's traits—not that they're bad, but she'll talk about the babysitter's husband and things that she does there and I just feel like I'm missing out. So it's really hard. (Stacey)

Social and Educational Benefits for Children

Several of the part-time stay-at-home mothers discussed the social and educational benefits their children receive through child care. For example, Carol said working part time is advantageous for her children because it allows them "to get out a little bit." She said,

My husband and I are always debating, “Well, should you stay home full time?” I think we finally, for a while, we’ve been pretty decided that it’s really good for the kids to get out a little bit. So I think the 20 hours a week is a perfect mix. (Carol)

Several other mothers talked about specific social benefits their children gain through child care, such as learning to play and share, having time with their friends, learning to listen to other adults, and problem solving skills. These benefits are illustrated in the ensuing passages:

[My son] likes going to the babysitter. I ran a couple of errands this morning and just dropped him off there for like an hour and a half, and it’s good for them, too. I don’t care who says it’s not, but it is. They need to go play with different people and share and not hit. You know what I mean? They really do. It’s good for him, too, or else he’s just be stuck to my leg....The social skills is the main thing, and just being away from me. I mean, if you know any kids that don’t go to daycare by the age of 3—if they’ve been home every minute of their life with their mom at age 3—they’re challenging. I can’t imagine how any mom doesn’t think that’s beneficial.... (Drea)

[Jasmine] goes to school on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday during the days.... She’s able to spend a lot of time with her friends...and they do lots of projects and stuff, and she really likes it. She loves her school. (Jacqui)

[My mom’s] going to be on vacation, so I’ll have somebody else watch him on the days that I have to work. And I think it’s good for him to be around other kids and get that kind of exposure and know that he has to listen to other adults besides mommy and daddy. (Meredith)

They gain the social interaction and learning how to work through their problems with their peers [at daycare]. You learn a lot of social skills being in that kind of environment and they wouldn’t get that if they were just here with me all day. So they learn a lot of social skills, and they’ve learned some educational stuff. (Patricia)

In the previous passage Patricia mentioned that her children also learn “some educational stuff” through attending daycare. Carol similarly mentioned the cognitive skills her son has gained by attending a daycare center. She said,

But then again we’ve seen him really blossom since he’s been going to the [daycare] center. He’s learning his ABCs and learning to count and he’s a lot more—because he’s kind of shy—when he is around strangers he’s a lot more outgoing now. (Carol)

Interestingly, Stacey, whose daughter is cared for in a home-based daycare, rather than at a daycare center, feels her daughter is not learning the cognitive skills she needs in order to be prepared to begin preschool next year. She said,

I know we have a really good babysitter, but I know there's not a lot of one-on-one time. She's not sitting down with her reading her stories, and not pointing things out specifically to her. The babysitter we have just lets the kids play amongst themselves, which she needs, too, but it's just not the same. I've done some reading on it and recommendations from family members. I know it's not the best, but you just can't survive in this world almost anymore without working....And so I worry about her going to preschool [next year] because a lot of the parents that stay home are going to be playing games with their kids and reading to them a lot, and we can only do this at night when we're usually tired. So that's hard. (Stacey)

It seems many of the negatives and positives these mothers believe are related to placing their children in child care are directly or indirectly linked to the type of child care provider each child is with throughout the day. In the following section, several passages illustrate what these mothers perceive creates the ideal child care situation for their children.

Finding the Right Child Care Provider

All of the mothers I interviewed seem to have had experiences with different types of child care or different child care providers, or at least have strong opinions about which type of child care or child care provider is right for their child or children. Lori, for example, has an 8-month-old son and strongly believes that child care of any type is not a good option for him. She said,

With what's going on in the world today, I'd much rather be home with my kids than have to bring them to somebody else. You can only trust so many people.... I've worked in daycare, and there's some great teachers out there, but I've worked in at least 8 to 10 different situations and I've seen what goes on! I just don't trust everyone enough, you know, to watch my son. (Lori)

For this reason, Lori has chosen to watch her son herself while she works at home, as well as to have some in-home care providers come into her home and help care for him when she needs to leave the house for appointments or when she needs some uninterrupted time to work at home. In short, Lori's child care preference is in-home care.

Other mothers I interviewed have different preferences. For example, Stacey, like Lori, dislikes center-based child care; however, instead of having their daughter cared for in their home, she and her husband take her to a family child care provider who cares for children in her own home. Stacey said,

We're happy with the daycare we have because we know she's safe. We know she's not around cigarette smoke or alcohol or caffeine or anything that we don't want her to have. We know that if anything goes wrong the babysitter will be able to handle it. And we also know that a lot of the babysitters in town are about the same. My husband, when he worked for [the Electric Company], he would go into some of the daycares—he went into that one ... and said he didn't like it because the kids were all eating lunch and one little boy wanted some peas and the provider said, "You can't have any peas because you didn't eat yours yesterday." So he didn't like that. They cost a lot more and [our current provider] would never say something like that. She knows better. So I think a lot of those—you pay more and you get less-trained providers. (Stacey)

Drea also takes her son to a family child care provider, largely because she does not want to pay the "outrageously priced" fees of a child care center and because she believes they do not provide children with enough attention. She explained,

I have no desire to put him in a center. One, they're outrageously priced, which, again, you hate to have money ruling your decisions, but welcome to reality. And I just think they don't get the attention that they need. My daycare provider is fairly new.... She does the crafts with them, and all that kind of...and she'll tell me what really happened. You know, if he gets bit, she'll just say, "Levi bit him." or "Wade bit Levi and I got mad at him." So it's trust, mainly, and there really aren't centers around here. You wouldn't believe the money they charge. A lot of centers charge you, whether they're there or not—you pay so much a month or so much a week. Well, for somebody like me, that's no good. I want to pay when he's there only. That's part of the benefit of being part-time, is that you're not paying daycare for 5 days a week, so she charges me by the hour. (Drea)

Similar to the other mothers I have discussed thus far, Meredith also has no desire to place her son in a child care center. Instead, she takes him to her mother's on the days she works. Meredith particularly enjoys having her mother watch Carson because they share a similar style of discipline. She said,

It works out wonderful! [My mom] loves it.... The fact that he's with my mom makes me not worried so much about—because I've given her permission to discipline. We have pretty much the same standards as far as what we'll allow and what we won't and when we'll spank and when we don't and that type of thing.... If it wasn't my mom, then it wasn't going to be the right person to watch him. (Meredith)

Three of the part-time stay-at-home mothers also take their children to child care centers. For example, Carol had a bad experience with a family child care provider and now takes her children to a center, as she explains in this passage:

We used to go to a lady in her house, but we started having really bad feelings about that. She was always just really distracted. She took way too much work for herself. She took too many kids. And she wasn't the type of person that took kids because she loved kids. I think she took them because she wanted to stay home with her kids. So, I won't go off on all that, but I've been unhappy with daycares before. (Carol)

Prior to placing her daughter in a child care center, Jacqui also had difficulty finding child care that she and her husband "really liked." She said,

We couldn't find child care that we really liked. We found someone we really liked and then she started having physical problems, so we tried to find someone else. And we never found anyone that felt really good to us. So, finally, actually, we flew my sister out and she stayed with us for several months as a live-in nanny.... [Now] she goes to [a center]. They have a separate house for the toddlers—completely separate. And I really like the teachers there. (Jacqui)

Finally, Patricia uses a different type of care for each of her children and she is happy with each.

Specifically her preschool-aged daughter attends a family daycare, while her kindergarten-aged son attends a child care center. Clearly, each mother chooses a child care situation which works best for her needs and for the needs of her children.

Theme 5. "Good" Mothering

Like the full-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed, these part-time stay-at-home mothers each have a personal opinion of what "good" mothering entails. Specifically, these part-time stay-at-home mothers believe the "ideal" mother shows her children she loves them, spends time with her children, and teaches her children the values that she believes are important. These mothers also have "role model" mothers, including their own mothers or other friends. Finally, they evaluate the "goodness" of their mothering in several ways, including whether or not their children love them, how their children behave in public and interact with others, and comparing themselves to other mothers.

The Ideal Mother

Most of the part-time stay-at-home mothers said that the ideal mother is loving, understanding, and provides her children with plenty of attention. The following passages elucidate the importance these mothers place on loving their children:

I guess an ideal mother is just somebody who loves their kids for who they are and doesn't put added pressure on them to be something that they're not and provides them with the security that they need and the freedom that they need and are open to whatever. (Patricia)

[I want to give] her certain things that are important for me in raising her, and her having a good self-esteem and having a solid base, knowing that she's important and that what she has to say is important. And that people will always love her no matter what, and she can always love herself no matter what. (Jacqui)

[Being a good mother is] just being very loving and expressing that love, you know, so they know that you love them. And I hope that when he's older he knows he can tell me things and I won't freak out.... I just think you need to be there and be as understanding as possible. (Drea)

Meredith added that in addition to simply loving one's children, a mother should love her children enough to discipline them. She said,

I think somebody who loves their kids and would do anything for them, but also loves them enough to discipline them, show them how to live, and have a Godly influence on their lives—somebody who your kids want to be like when they grow up.... I try to be balanced in... my discipline with him and the things that we do. We have fun. We can sit and cuddle. I feel like I spend time with him. (Meredith)

Taking time to play with their children is also important for many of these part-time stay-at-home mothers. For example, Carol talked about the importance of always giving her children the attention they need:

[The ideal mother is] optimistic, and cheerful. I always want to be able to sit down and spend time with Bryant and really give him my attention. I'll be feeling like I have to clean up the dishes and everything in the kitchen and he'll come in and want me to play with something, and I feel like I should always be able to sit down and play with him—always just giving my attention, one-on-one. (Carol)

Another mother said that her personal ideal included having more time not just to be with her daughter, but to cook healthier meals for her, and even to home-school her. She said,

Some of those mothers, I guess, that cook all organic, healthy foods for their children everyday, I guess, would be my ideal.... I guess that that would be part of my ideal mother if I had time to do that and the patience to cook better for her—and spend more time with her and read to her more and teach her more, I guess. Home schooling her would be part of it. (Stacey)

Two mothers specifically mentioned what an ideal mother is *not*, as is indicated in these comments:

I don't think that yelling at your kids—especially spanking them or anything—I don't think that that does them any good. I'm all for redirection, and I only know that because my background's in education.... Sometimes you see moms and they're dragging their kids and yelling at them and grabbing them by the arm, and that just really makes me angry.... When I don't see them at all try and like get their eye contact and communicate with them and they just automatically whip them around or whatever, that makes me angry. I'm like, "That's not right!" And I'll just stare at them. Seriously, I will. (Lori)

I'm always seeing people that are beating their kids.... Like there was this woman who was dragging her son by the ear! And she smacked him on the top of his head and she was yelling at him, so I called the police! Because, to me, that's not OK! And I am astounded every time I see it. (Jacqui)

Like the full-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed, these part-time stay-at-home mothers also believe that part of what encompasses “good” mothering is teaching their children specific values. Meredith, for example, believes it is important that she teach her son “a love for God and obedience to parents,” as is mentioned in this comment:

I would like him to develop a love for God and obedience to parents and people of authority—to show respect to them, to be a hard worker, have a good work ethic, and be a good friend to people that are not just people that he would choose because they're nice to look at, but to have an overall respect for people that, you know, that might not necessarily be the people that most people would choose to befriend—and not that he has to be great friends with them—you know, to treat people with dignity. (Meredith)

Meredith's personal values stem largely from her faith in God and teachings from the Bible, as is illustrated in the following passage:

We believe that the Bible tells us that we're supposed to raise our kids “in the love and admonition of God” and so we try—that's our foundation for what we do in our teaching him and we have a lot to learn. There's a lot of verses in the Bible that we probably need to look at more often. (Meredith)

Other mothers similarly mentioned some important values which they would like to teach their children, such as discerning the hidden messages from the media or other sources and having the “right influences” in life:

It’s important to me that she learns reading and literacy—like, she understands how to interpret the messages that we’re bombarded with everyday, especially being a girl. That’s so important, I think. You notice we don’t even have a TV. It’s upstairs. We put it away in the closet.... I felt like we were watching TV too much.... We’ll watch commercials and we’ll say, “Oh, they’re trying to tell you that if you buy French fries, it makes you a happy person.” I don’t know to what level she understands, but it’s really important to me to teach her how to interpret those messages. (Jacqui)

[We try to make] sure that he has the right influences on his life at the right times, and just making sure that he’s not watching something on TV that’s going to scare him or that doesn’t teach the values that I would want him to know. (Meredith)

Although each of these part-time stay-at-home mothers has a conception of what a “good” mother is and is *not*, as well as what values they believe they should teach their children, most also recognized that “ideal” mothering is different for everyone. Drea explained,

Everybody has their own idea [of the ideal mother]. You know what I mean? What I think is good for my kids is totally separate from what one of my friends thinks. I’ll spank my kid, she won’t. That type of thing. (Drea)

Carol specifically said that an ideal mother does not need to work, but instead just needs to do things that keep her “fresh and optimistic.” She said,

I don’t think the ideal mom has to have a job outside the house—it’s just whatever keeps them stimulated mentally, and keeps them fresh and optimistic. (Carol)

Additionally, Jacqui suggested that a “good parent” needs to strive to make herself happy. She said,

And I really think that you can’t be a good parent if you’re not a happy person, even if you fake it....which I think a lot of people do. So I think that my perception of that is probably maintaining the same balance between keeping yourself happy and your child happy. (Jacqui)

Finally, two mothers’ comments seem to suggest they recognize a difference between the “ideal mother” and a “real mother.” Meredith acknowledged that although nobody achieves perfection, it’s important to simply have a goal to improve. She said, “I don’t know if anybody achieves their ideal mother. I think it’s always important to have goals to be better at whatever you’re

doing” (Meredith). A portion of the interview with Stacey shows that she, too, recognizes a difference between “ideal” and “real.” This exchange of information is shown as follows, with Stacey beginning:

An ideal mother is never angry, has a perfectly clean house and has all the developmentally appropriate toys laying around.... Probably the ideal mother would have a sparkling clean house and have the perfectly well-behaved children. (Stacey)

Is that an ideal for you or for the world? (Interviewer)

Yeah, that’s what the world thinks. (Stacey)

What do you think? (Interviewer)

What do I think? Kind of a cross between that and a real mother—a little bit above where I’m at. (Stacey)

In short, although these mothers have a clear idea of what “good” mother is and is not, they also believe that “good” mothering varies across individuals, as well as across time, and they seem to recognize that the icon of the “ideal” mother prevalent throughout our society is fairly unrealistic.

Admiration for Role Models

Like the full-time stay-at-home mothers, several of the part-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed have personal role models whom they admire and from whom they learn important mothering skills. The succeeding statements illustrate how several of these admire their own mothers or mothers-in-law:

My mom was a great mom. She didn’t work outside the home, but she instilled in us girls to always go for a career, just to have something for a backup in case—even when you are married. Um, I admire my sister a lot. I think she’s a great mom. (Carol)

Well, [I admire] my mom, of course. (Lori)

Richard’s mom—I admire her a lot. She did a good job with my husband, I think. She’s a teacher herself and has taught all grade levels and she really knows a lot about children, so I ask her questions. She had to take Richard and his brother to their grandmother years ago to watch them because she was a teacher and had to have time to do that, so she knows what it’s like. (Stacey)

Several mothers believe that, although their own mothers did a “pretty good job” of parenting, there are some things they would do differently. For example, Meredith is trying to avoid the “overcritical” interactions which her mother often displays. She said,

I'd say my mom's a pretty good role model. She's not perfect. There's things I try not to do that she does....Right now—and I think it might just be her stage of life—she seems overcritical of people. And I'm trying not to do that.... That would be the only thing that I don't want to follow her in right now. (Meredith)

Jacqui personally hopes to avoid the overly-strict characteristics her mother (and father) displayed.

She explained.

I think my mom did a pretty good job. I was the second oldest of six kids, and I was the biggest rebel—and my parents are very strict—so I really kind of blazed a trail through there.... My parents really freaked out about some of the littlest things, and I would do that differently. But I just—some parts of what my parents did I think was really awesome, and some stuff I would change. (Jacqui)

Although Patricia admires her mother, she hopes to have better communication with her own children. She said.

We all learn from our parents. And my mom was a good mom. She was always there for us. I think there were things that she could have done better, basically as far as communication, but that was basically the generation that I grew up in. The parents didn't. I don't think, talk to their kids as much as maybe a good parent should do now, about important things like alcohol and drugs and sex. (Patricia)

Two mothers also said they admire and learn from the parenting styles of friends or neighbors, as is shown in these passages:

Somebody [else] that I know, like Elizabeth—I've known her for quite a while and she has six kids. So I guess she would be like a role model that I see that is with kids all the time. I never see her get angry or stressed out—and she's got some ornery kids. You know, they do some crazy stuff, that I'm like, "Oh my gosh!"...and she's just really calm. I guess other people feel differently about the way she is with them, but I think she's great with her kids. (Lori)

My neighbor over there has two teenage girls and I really admire her. Her children are very well-behaved and intelligent and just nice children all around. She also works at a daycare—a preschool. She's a teacher's helper so she has lots of ideas and she knows all the developmental milestones for [my daughter] so I don't have to look them up. So I can ask her a question and she a lot of times will know. In fact, I wish she would not have a job at all so I could just take Ally over there and have her watch her one on one. (Stacey)

Finally, although mothers and friends are important examples for many of these mothers, some mothers specifically stated that they have no single role model, but rather admire parts of several people. For example, Drea said she could not think of a single role model, but instead she

appreciated “bits and pieces of many people.” Jacqui similarly said, “There’s not one particular person that I would want to emulate 100%—just the best parts of some people.” Finally, two mothers talked about learning from other mothers who may not necessarily even be role models. They said,

You just try to pick up pointers from [other mothers]: “Oh, they brought juice boxes to the restaurant. That’s a good idea!” (Carol)

I guess when I see parents do things that I think are good then I try and learn from those things and say, “Gosh, that’s a good idea. Maybe I should try that.” And I guess on the other side, too, when I see parents do things that I think are really stupid, then I learn. I mean, you’re always learning and you learn from those things, too, and you’re like, “Oooh, I hope I’ve never done that!” or “Gosh, I need to make sure I don’t ever do that because that’s really stupid!” (Patricia)

Personal Evaluation of Self and Child

Most of the part-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed believe they are good mothers. Lori said, “I’m an awesome mom!” Patricia indicated she is a good mother because she gives her children “the freedom that they need, yet, the safety and the security that they need, too, to stay safe and comfortable.” Stacey said she hopes she is a good mother. She added, “I sure try hard enough.” Several of these mothers said they feel they are doing a “good job” with their children because their children love them, as is illustrated in these comments:

I guess all you can do is the best that you can. I mean, and if you know that you’ve tried to do the best that you could each day, then you know that’s the best that you can do....Um, I think they love me. I think they respect me. That’s the important thing. (Patricia)

He knows I love him, so then I think I’ve done a good job. (Drea)

They never come out and say, “Mommy, thank you for spending the whole day with me. You’ve done really well,” or “You’ve given me enough.” You know, there’s never that. So you just never feel like you can do enough. But I think they both love me, so that’s all that matters. (Carol)

Another way several of these mothers evaluate their mothering skills is by how their children interact with others. Two mothers explained,

He’s good most of the time. He’s not a terror, you know. I don’t think people see us coming and go, “Oh, no! She has that kid!” Most people think he’s nice and he acts nice out of the home when I’m not there.... So that’s good. People enjoy his company and think he’s nice. (Drea)

My son is very healthy and responsive—likes people and is energetic and is photogenic. He'll smile when you talk to him. I guess because of his mannerisms I know I'm doing the right things and I'm a good mom. Um, when people come up to you and compliment you on your son, and things like that.... I have somebody come up to me everyday that's attracted to him. "Oh, he has such beautiful blue eyes," and he'll just look and smile and make noise. So I guess because of the way that he reacts I know I'm a good mom, and because I have patience and because I'm willing to learn what I need to do to teach him what he needs to know or take care of him. (Lori)

Another mother said she feels validated when she sees how her daughter plays with her dolls. She explained,

I feel like I'm doing a good job parenting when I watch her play by herself because she'll play with her dolls and she'll pat them on the head and she'll say, "It's OK. Don't cry. Be happy." She is so nice to her dolls. And the other day she was talking to herself in the mirror and I was peeking around the corner and she said, "Good job! Good try! Good job!" just over and over again. And I have no idea what she was imagining or talking about, but my heart gets all big and I'm like, "I'm doing a good job!" ... It's totally validating when I see her playing with her dolls because she's never mean to them. She's always very kind and compassionate. (Jacqui)

Many of the part-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed also evaluate their personal mothering skills by comparing themselves to other mothers. When asked if there are situations in which she compares herself to other mothers, Stacey replied,

You go to the park and you see the mothers pull out the gourmet lunches... especially with really little children, you see a mom with the gourmet, homemade, puréed stuff and everything that I don't have time to do. (Stacey)

Meredith talked about occasionally comparing herself to her sister-in-law who home-schools her children, as well as to some of her friends who seem to have an almost perfect style of interacting with their children. She said,

I've compared myself [to other moms]—well, even like my sister-in-law home-schools, and I could never do that. I just don't have the patience for it. Obviously it works for her, but would never work for me.... Even just how some of my friends deal with their kids or they explain things better to their kids, or their kids seem to understand things, you know, when they explain it to them. And their discipline and the way they discipline or whatever. And I'm like, "Oh, I wish I could do that." But some of it's just your personality and the other part is just, you know, they were education majors so they have a different perspective on how to talk to the kids. I never took any education classes, so—and they've also read a lot more books than I have. I suppose if I read some more parenting books it might help. (Meredith)

In the previous passage Meredith said she believes reading parenting books might help her evaluate and improve her mothering skills. Stacey similarly mentioned using child rearing books and internet sources to help her learn things that would help her be a better parent. She explained.

I go on the internet sometimes [for child rearing information]. When we were potty training her we checked all the ideas. We went online and we checked to see if anyone else did the same thing. And then I have a couple books I got from Richard's aunt. And that *What to Expect: The Toddler Years* is pretty good.

Although I previously mentioned that the part-time stay-at-home mothers seem to realize that "good" mothering is flexible, many of them nevertheless seem to rely on popular child rearing books to guide their mothering.

Theme 6: The Marriage Relationship and Division of Household Labor/Child Rearing

Like the full-time stay-at-home mothers, each of the part-time stay-at-home mothers discussed aspects of their marriages, explained why they rather than their husbands stay at home part time, and described how they divide household responsibilities with their spouses. Interestingly, however, the part-time stay-at-home mothers reported a more equal division of household labor with their husbands than did the full-time stay-at-home mothers, and they said the main reasons they, rather than their husbands, stay at home part time are financial and personal.

The Marriage Relationship

Each of the part-time mothers I interviewed reported having a positive marriage relationship. For example, when asked about her level of satisfaction with her marriage, Lori replied, "Oh, very satisfied. Yeah, very satisfied." Other mothers made similar comments:

[My marriage is] great! It's had its moments, but I've been married 5 ½ years and it's just gotten better. The older we get, it's gotten better. It's just, it's very fulfilling. It's good to come home to, so to speak. And we complement each other very well. It's a shoulder to lean on. It's all of that. I'm very, very fortunate because I have a lot of people that have parts of it but they don't have it all, but I feel like I've got everything that you expect to get when you go into the whole deal. You know, we have our own time. We let each other go do our thing. There's no jealousy or any of that....It's great and we have a lot of fun together. You have to have laughter and you have to have things in common and like to go out without the child. He would do anything for me.... (Drea)

I was 30, actually, when I got married, so I'd had a long time of singlehood and stuff, so I really appreciate what I have now. And, um, so we're still in our fresh part of our relationship. Still pretty happy—well, we're always hopefully going to be happy, but, um, we're real open, communicate a lot, big on compromise.... Yeah, it's really good. (Carol)
We've been married for 11 ½ years and it was just us for the first 5, and I think we communicate pretty well. We typically know what's going on in each other's lives. (Patricia)

I think [our marriage is] pretty good. He is starting grad school in the fall... so he's really starting to get stressed out with all that grad school stuff and plus he still has to work part time for us to be able to do what we do. But overall, it's pretty good. [Switching to part-time] has definitely helped. (Jacqui)

In the following passage one mother said she and her husband “have a really good relationship.” However, she also mentioned having a few arguments about housework or money, as well as the fact that they argue less now that they do not have the stress associated with one of them working during the day and the other working at night. She said.

[My husband and I] have a really good relationship, I think. We have the normal arguments about who does more. Um, but generally we have a really good relationship, so I don't think there's anything we would change. We have our usual arguments about money, though, that I wish we didn't have. They're few and far between, though, because there's really nothing we can really do about it now. But, so I don't think I'd change anything. There's a lot I would have changed if you would have asked me this when we had our swing shift, because that was a huge strain. We argued more and everything. Right now it's pretty good. (Stacey)

Several mothers reported feeling that their husbands appreciate their role as part-time stay-at-home mothers. For example, Lori said, “My husband really likes the fact that I'm able to be home and take care of our son.” She added, “Danny is so great because he says, ‘You're a great mom, honey. You did a good job today.’” However, one mother said her husband seems to wish she would work more. She said, “I think sometimes [my husband] wishes I could work more.... It's frustrating for him when he goes through the bills and we can't pay some of them right away” (Stacey).

Two mothers also specifically mentioned the importance of communication in solving any problems that might arise in their marriage relationships:

Like I was so mad at [my husband] this past week because we were trying to get ready for this company and I was just feeling way taken for granted and then it's like he... we talked about a few things, you know, we were able to talk about it, but I didn't even have to talk about it. Then we had this fun weekend and he was really thoughtful and I realized everything I was thinking wasn't true. It's like, when you get so busy and you don't communicate as

much, you don't have time for each other. but when you do have time.... Everyone always said that: "You need time to re-connect once you have kids." And I was like, "OK, whatever," but now I can see you do. (Carol)

When we got married we agreed that if we had an issue, that we were allowed to sit down and say, "I've got this problem with you. You really hurt my feelings or pissed me off." or whatever it was and to know not to take it to heart—that we can't hold that stuff in. Sometimes I do and I wait for him to figure it out, you know. I'll stomp around, but he's pretty good about just knowing what my needs are and having them met. (Lori)

Like the full-time group, the part-time stay-at-home mothers seem to have generally positive marriage relationships and feel supported by their spouses.

Why Moms—Not Dads—Stay at Home Part Time: Finances and Preferences

Unlike many of the full-time stay-at-home mothers, most of the part-time stay-at-home mothers did not express a sense of feeling "better equipped" than their husbands to stay at home with their children. Instead, most of these mothers said they, rather than their husbands, stay at home part time because of financial factors and personal preferences. Specifically, these mothers said they make less money than their husbands and they believe they enjoy being at home more than their husbands would. When asked "Why do you, rather than your husband, stay at home part time?" most of the mothers listed financial factors first. Patricia responded, "Because he makes the money. He's the money winner." Meredith similarly replied, "He makes more than I do. That's the main reason."

Stacey had an analogous response:

Well, at the time he was making a lot more [money]. He worked for [an electric company] at the time and he had a good job. So he was making a lot more and it was just easier for me to stay home.... I think that's the way it is with a lot of women: their husbands can just get jobs that pay better. (Stacey)

Many of these mothers also believe they enjoy being at home more than their husbands would. For example, Drea said,

He'd go stir-crazy [if he stayed at home]. That man cannot sit still for anything. It's just his personality, you know. personalities. I like to be home and I like to cook and do all that and he doesn't, so that's just how it worked out basically. (Drea)

Lori thinks she simply had a stronger desire than her husband to be at home. She explained, "I think I just wanted it more than he did—for me to be able to be at home."

Not only do many of these mothers say they want to be at home more than their husbands do, but some also think their husbands would not have the patience to be at home with children for a large portion of the day or simply prefer to "provide for the family." For example, Patricia and Lori respectively said,

He doesn't have the patience to stay home with them full time. So even if I was the money winner and he wasn't, then he would still probably work because he doesn't have the patience to do it full time. (Patricia)

I don't think he'd ever want to stay home.... I don't think that it's in his nature. He's got a really good work ethic, so he feels that he needs to provide for the family. (Lori)

In contrast, however, some mothers also acknowledged that their husbands are wonderful fathers and would like being the stay-at-home parent. For example, Lori said, "I think Danny's just as good a father as I am a mother." Stacey said, "I wouldn't mind if he stayed home, and I'm sure he wouldn't mind either. He's very good with her." Other comments included the following:

He's the type of person that would love to stay at home, and he would like to work from home someday, but right now it doesn't work out that way because he's a consultant. (Meredith)

He says, "I would love to be in your shoes. I would love to be staying home." But he says because of his mom, that she always wanted to be home—he, from the very beginning, wanted to do that for his wife. And so he just thought it would be better to be more traditional.... I'm glad that he's willing to think that. You know, I'm enough "women's lib" to believe that it could be either way, but I'd rather he let me do it. (Carol)

In the preceding passage Carol acknowledged that her husband would enjoy being the stay-at-home parent in their family; however, she also expressed gratitude that he chose the more traditional role of full-time breadwinner and was "willing" to let her be the stay-at-home parent. It seems that although Carol's comment, as well as most of the other comments from the part-time stay-at-home mothers, do not reflect the belief that mothers are "better equipped" to be stay-at-home parents, such as was reflected in many of the statements from the full-time stay-at-home mothers, the part-time group

nonetheless adheres to more traditional gender-role ideologies which suggest women should be more involved in household and childrearing. However, these ideologies may be somewhat more liberal than those of the full-time group because the part-time stay-at-home mothers seem to possess a “willingness” for their husbands to be at home if they really wanted to.

Division of Household Labor and Child Rearing Responsibilities

Unlike most of the mothers who stay at home full time, most of whom reported doing the majority of household tasks, many of the part-time stay-at-home mothers indicated a more equal division of household labor between themselves and their spouses. However, like the full-time group, they also seem to feel a sense of “ownership” for the household domain. The following comments illustrate the relative equality of household labor among many of these mothers and their spouses:

There are things that I do that he doesn't, but not things that he *won't* do. Like, I *don't* mow the lawn because I can't. My allergies would—I wouldn't make it through.... And since I'm home now part time I do the laundry mostly. But as far as cleaning...he does the vacuuming most of the time; I do the dusting because he doesn't like to dust. We just split things up, things like toilets we both end up doing probably half the time. (Meredith)

Well, each of us thinks we do more [housework] than the other. So I think that I do more and he thinks that he does more. I do more of the “day-to-day” than he does, and I always make him mow the grass because I hate it. But when it really comes down to it, when we're cleaning when company comes, we split up the house even. I always do laundry, but I don't mind doing it. I always make him clean the bathroom. So it's kind of even. (Stacey)

I do the cooking, grocery shopping, cleaning up the dishes, you know, keeping the kitchen clean. And I do the vacuuming for the most part, and the dusting. And he does the bills, the financial planning, the outside—the yard work and that kind of stuff—and he does most of the laundry. Yeah, he does really good.... He's almost too picky. That's why he took that job [of doing laundry] because he didn't trust me to do it. (Carol)

Jacqui described how she and her husband share a relatively equal dislike or indifference toward housework, saying,

I think neither of us likes to do housework! So mostly it doesn't get done, as you can tell! We try to keep things cluttered, yet clean. That's our goal. Completely neat will never, ever happen.... But for division of household responsibilities, it kind of changes. I think he should do more, but he probably thinks I should do more, too. (Jacqui)

Despite the fairly equal division of household labor among most of the part-time stay-at-home mothers, two still reported doing more of the housework. Drea explained,

I'm the maid. I'm the cook. I'm the checkbook balancer. I'm the accountant. I'm the family runner of the business, I guess you would say. I'm the allowance-giver-outer for the husband. You know, the grocery-getter. All that kind of good stuff.... He does the lawn, well, not all of it. I do the gardening and the trimming and the winterizing and cutting down rose bushes, but he does trim the trees and he always does the lawn. He changes the oil in the vehicles—that kind of stuff. (Drea)

Patricia similarly described doing more housework, which interestingly seems to be related to having children. She said,

[I'm the] housekeeper, plumber, contractor, maintenance man, groundskeeper, garbage man. I mean, the list is endless.... Luke tries to help out around the house. It's harder now. We used to have assigned duties when it was just us, and that kind of fell to the wayside after we had Andrew. And we still sort of have assigned chores within the house. It's his job to vacuum and to mop, and it's his job to take the garbage out. It's his job to mow and do the weed-wacker, and then it's my job to basically do everything else. So it's not really balanced as much as it used to be. (Patricia)

Many of the part-time stay-at-home mothers I interviewed also made comments that seem to suggest they feel a sense of ownership of or responsibility for the household domain. For example, when asked about how she and her spouse divide household tasks, Lori replied,

Maybe just by what we like and don't like. He takes out the garbage.... I don't let him touch the laundry. I do the laundry, but he should help fold and I'll ask him to help carry it up and down the stairs. Things like that. You have certain quirky-nesses, I guess, and for me, I feel like I load the dishwasher better than he does. When he does, he shoves it in there and it comes out not clean. I know it sounds really picky, but there's just things that, you know—And I've gotten a lot better. I used to be really bad. I was really picky. But I've learned to accept that what he does needs to be good enough. And visa versa.... He knows that there are certain things that I like to have done. I like the kitchen clean. I like the main part to be picked up. I don't care what the bedroom looks like or anything else, but I'd like it just to be picked up because I have a lot of people come over. He's just really good about now knowing what I like to have done. He'll unload the dishwasher. I'll load it.... You know, there are certain rules that we've established. And then again he gets his time, too, to go over to [our friends'] and go climbing because that's his little hobby. So he knows that if he helps me that I'm going to in return say, "Yeah, go climbing tonight. That's fine." (Lori)

Several phrases in this passage indicate that Lori feels a sense of ownership over household tasks, such as, "I don't let him....," "I'll ask him to....," "I've learned to accept that what he does needs to be good enough," and "He knows that there are certain things I like to have done."

Several expressions in the following remark from Drea also suggest a personal feeling of responsibility or control over household tasks, including “He has to....” “I don’t ask him to....,” or “I just have the few things that I expect him to do”:

[When I worked full time] he always did all the vacuuming and cleaned all the bathrooms. That’s what he just did and he always did it, and we moved home and it kind of ceased. He does some laundry. Occasionally he’ll empty the dishwasher. He always puts his stuff in the dishwasher. He has to put the lid down. That’s about it. If I ask—I don’t ask him to, though, because I don’t mind doing it. If I’m having a bad week and I’m crabby and he can tell, he might vacuum because he knows I’m just having one of those irritating, “I’m tired of waiting on you” bits. That doesn’t happen very often though. So part of it’s my fault because I don’t ask. I just have the few things that I expect him to do and keep his stuff picked up, then all is well.... He’s just spoiled. (Drea)

It is interesting to note that in the previous paragraph Drea reported that the primary reason she does more of the household work is because she does not ask her husband for help. Requesting help with household tasks seems to be a topic mentioned by other mothers, as well. For example, Jacqui said, “Pretty much he’ll take out the garbage when I complain to him to do that, and he’ll do the dishes probably twice a week, but that’s about it—and he sweeps sometimes.” Carol similarly described asking her husband to do a particular task—namely, to put his dishes in the dishwasher. In the following comment Carol, like Drea, seems to recognize that if she doesn’t ask or “push it a little bit” he will continue to neglect doing what she wants. She said,

One thing, I do wish he would do more in the kitchen, though—just if he would like put the dishes in the dishwasher when he’s done. So I hold little resentments like that.... I used to work [at a pharmacy] for the whole weekend and I said, “When I come home I don’t want to see any dishes in the sink.” And that worked, but now I don’t work the weekends, so—but I’m sure if I pushed it he would do it, and I might push it a little bit later, but right now we’re both kind of busy. Our plates are full or whatever. I don’t want to add any more stress. (Carol)

It is obvious that although many of the part-time stay-at-home mothers’ spouses may help with housework, these mothers are still more “in charge” of the household domain.

Two mothers also made statements relating to how they and their husbands share child rearing responsibilities. Stacey praised her husband’s helpfulness with their daughter. She said,

He was really good with her when she was little. I kind of had postpartum depression because I can't deal with a loss of sleep, and she was colicky. He would get up in the night and stay with her, so he's very good with her. I'm lucky. And I know a lot of mothers that don't have that support. (Stacey)

Patricia, on the other hand, has a husband who would like to interact more with the children:

however, the children simply prefer their mother. She said,

I know my husband gets frustrated because both the kids are pretty clingy to me. And I'm like, "Well, I'm with them more than you." And if they need something—and sometimes it can be frustrating because they always come to me if they want something. "Mommy, get me some juice." "Mommy, can I have this?" "Can I have that?" And I'm like, "You know what? There is another adult in this room".... But, and that kind of frustrates my husband at times because they're always coming to me and they're like, "Can you put me to bed?" or "No, I want mommy to do it. I want mommy to do it. I want mommy to do it." And that makes him feel sad. But he understands that it's because I'm the one that's here with them and that's what they're used to. (Patricia)

Like the full-time stay-at-home mothers, the part-time stay-at-home mothers continue to struggle with how to divide household tasks and child rearing responsibilities; in short, mothers in both groups still seem to do more of each.

Theme 7. Future Desires and Plans

Finally, each of the part-time stay-at-home mothers made several references about their current desires, as well as their plans for the future. Like many of the full-time stay-at-home mothers, several part-time stay-at-home mothers discussed wanting housekeepers or maids, as is shown in these passages:

I really wish I could have a maid. I really honestly do, because then I could spend my time doing things with my day that are productive. (Jacqui)

I wish I didn't have to do any cleaning. I wish I didn't have to do any errands. I wish I could just have fun with [my daughter] all day and have everything done and have a nice maid come in and do all that stuff for me. (Stacey)

I wish I had a housekeeper, so I didn't have to worry about—feel bad about—the house. You know, not worry about being in the house. (Carol)

Many of these mothers also expressed a hope to have financial security:

I expect to be reasonably well off financially. I have specific financial goals that I want to meet. (Jacqui)

You hate to say money has any importance at all, but unfortunately in this world it really does.... I don't need to be rich or anything by any means and I don't want every toy I've ever wished I had, but to just not have the stress of having to worry about, "How am I going to pay Peter and Buck or Paul to do that?" (Drea)

Hopefully we'll have ... a little bit more money to do the things that we want to do: the vacations and get [the kids] things that we can't now. (Stacey)

[I hope for] financial stability: to be able to never have to balance a checkbook. Seriously, to be able to—when you needs things—to go get them, not to have to budget and think of this and to think of that, to be able to have enough money saved to put my kids through school or through college, to be able to buy my dad an airplane, to be able to buy my parents things that they really, really want.... to be able to donate to causes, especially cancer. (Lori)

The part-time stay-at-home mothers all discussed their future career goals, as well. Most of them plan to continue working part time or to get a full-time job that has family-friendly hours so they could continue to have the flexibility to be available for their children's activities at school and after school.

...someday, when she's in school and won't be getting home until 3:00, I'd like to have a job that has mother's hours where I'd get off at 3:30 and would be able to come home.... I think I'll want to work. I think I would suffer from empty nest. It would be so quiet, and so many women work now, I don't know what I'd do.... So I think that if the kids weren't at home I would go crazy. I would go crazy. But I think I would have to get a job that I got home fairly early so I could get home when the kids got home. (Stacey)

I have told Paul that I don't ever want to work full time again. So that would be my goal. I wouldn't necessarily not pick up more hours, but...the most I will ever work is 36 [hours], just because I want to be able to have free time to go to [the kids'] games or go to activities that they have at school during the day. I want to be able to take off time and do things like that. (Meredith)

If I was going to work full time again it would be maybe once both of them are in elementary school, probably not until third or fourth grade until they're kind of used to the routine, and at that point I'd probably still want to have. I think, some sort of a schedule where I could make sure I was here after school and pick them up at the bus. (Patricia)

I'll probably still work [when he's in school]. You know, I'd like to be home in the mornings to get him to the bus and I want to be here when he gets home from school and be able to go to all his activities. And I want to be able to—they have classroom moms that help. I want to do all that kind of stuff. (Drea)

Jacqui plans to open her own retail clothing store in the next year and then eventually open a chain of stores as her business grows: however she hopes to always be able to offer family-friendly hours for herself and her employees. She said,

It's going to be really important to me to have a family-friendly workplace, because I know that people are better employees when they're happy—not just happy with their job, but happy at home, too.... Sometime down the road I want to be featured in *Working Mother* magazine for being a family-friendly workplace.... Some people say that you can't have both—you can't have a good family life and a good career—and I might be naïve, but I think you can, so I'm going to do it for myself. (Jacqui)

The specific professional or work-related goals of all of the mothers I interviewed include the following: opening a chain of retail clothing stores (Jacqui), working through a paralegal program and getting a job with “mother’s hours” (Stacey), being successful selling cosmetics (Lori), working part time in an information technology position rather than a loan tech. position (Meredith), continue working as a social worker as long as it does not become too stressful (Patricia), continuing to work part time as a pharmacist and maybe get more involved with work-related activities when her children are in school (Carol), and continuing to work part time at whatever job is convenient and socially fulfilling (Drea).

Other desires, plans, and wishes expressed by these mothers include: having more children in the neighborhood for their kids to play with (Carol), having grandparents living closer so they could provide child care, or not even needing child care at all (Stacey), owning a hot tub (Drea), reducing the commute to work by moving closer to work (Carol), purchasing a larger home (Stacey), traveling (Drea), moving to Colorado (Lori), never moving again (Drea), becoming more involved in work outreach programs as well as a women’s organization (Carol), and staying organized enough to manage the hectic school and activity schedules children have as they get older (Patricia). Stacey and Meredith were both pregnant with their second child at the time of the interview, so obviously their futures include additional family members.

Finally, like several full-time stay-at-home mothers, many of these part-time stay-at-home mothers have dreams for their children. For example, Stacey would like her daughter to “do really well in school.” Meredith would like to send her children to a private Baptist school if she and her husband can afford it. Drea hopes she will be a “cool mom,” and that she and her husband can pay for their son’s college expenses.

CHAPTER 7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

This study explored the “lived experiences” of married, college-educated full-time stay-at-home mothers and mothers employed part-time. Each informant interviewed for this research had one or two children under the age of 5 years and was married. Detailed demographic descriptions of each individual informant, along with scores from measures self-esteem, satisfaction with the parenting role, marital satisfaction, and life satisfaction, were provided in Chapter 4. Additionally, the major phenomenological themes discussed by these stay-at-home mothers were analyzed for each group (full-time and part-time) and presented in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively.

The considerable amount and depth of information that emerged as a result of this exploration of the phenomena of full-time and part-time stay-at-home mothering have enormous value not only for researchers and therapists, but for society as a whole. The major findings of this research, their integration with past research, and their implications for future research and applied settings are presented as follows:

(1) Mothers from both the full-time and part-time groups chose the stay-at-home mothering role, rather than full-time careers, because their top priority is their family and their children. Mothers from both groups made comments such as “being a mother is first” or “family always comes first” to describe the importance of their children and spouses. Little research has examined the importance of personal priorities in decision-making processes. This is largely due to the fact that personal values and belief systems are difficult to measure. Additional studies using qualitative methods should continue to examine the interrelationships between these variables.

(2) The mothers who had previously worked full time found balancing working and mothering roles stressful and exhausting. The “running around” or “balancing act” associated with full-time employment encouraged many of these mothers to reduce or eliminate their hours of paid employment. Interestingly, however, many of the part-time stay-at-home mothers who had already

reduced their hours from full-time to part-time described still feeling “torn” as they attempted handle the “give and take” of working and mothering. One mother said, “You feel you’re like not fully into either one. You feel guilty for your kids because you’re leaving them.... and then with work it’s like you’re not “gung-ho,” fully doing everything you could...” (Carol). These findings support research by Waldfogel (1997), who found that many mothers minimize their hours of employment in order to reduce work-family conflict and to have more time to be with their children. Quantitative measures of stress and hypertension during full-time employment as well as after the decision to work part-time or to stop working altogether would provide additional insight into the work-family conflict dilemma which many mothers continue to face today.

(3) The part-time stay-at-home mothers do not stay at home full time because they believe the income from their part-time employment is a “necessity” for their families. Bianchi (1995) and Herring and Wilson-Sadberry (1993) similarly reported that economic necessity is a strong determinant of a woman’s decision to work. In contrast, however, the full-time stay-at-home mothers often mentioned making financial sacrifices, such as shopping at garage sales or not having as many “things” as dual-career couples, in order to be able to stay at home full time. A fascinating topic for future research would be an investigation of the economic strategies which stay-at-home mother/breadwinner father-families utilize to enable them to subsist on one income. It is also interesting to note that while the part-time mothers feel they need some income and many of the full-time stay-at-home mothers seem to pride themselves on “getting by” on one income, both groups said one downfall of not being employed full-time (or not being employed at all) was the lower household income and the associated reduction or elimination of employment benefits, such as insurance.

(4) Many mothers said that combining mothering and employment offered them the “best of both worlds” because it provided them with time with their children as well as time to interact with adults. One mother in particular emphatically stated how much she enjoyed working because of the friends she gained through work. She said, “I love my job!... I love everybody I work with—I just

love them and I've become really close to them.... I have zillions of friends and I love it!" (Drea).

Social contact was an important determinant in most of the part-time stay-at-home mothers' decision to work part time. Phrases like "I have to do something besides being stuck inside the home." or "I need some contact" illustrate the part-time mothers' belief that they need more social contact than they would receive staying at home full time. Perhaps these mothers have a belief that they would feel isolated if they chose to stay at home, an occurrence which has been documented by some research (i.e., Zimmerman, 2000). Additionally, these mothers may not be aware of the strong support networks available for stay-at-home mothers (Bell and Ribbens, 1994; Dyck, 1992). Future research examining employed women's beliefs about full-time stay-at-home mothering, as well as the social support they receive from non-employment sources, would be interesting.

(5) Both groups mentioned deeply enjoying the love, fun, and play they experience with their children on a daily basis. These mothers described appreciating the hugs and kisses, going for walks, playing in the park, cuddling, watching their children reach milestones, such as crawling, and hearing their children's often-humorous "take" on things. However, both groups also mentioned feeling some periods of frustration when their children were misbehaving. This frustration was often the result of not knowing how to discipline their children when they misbehaved. Thompson and Walker (1989) similarly described that while mothers "voice the sense of meaning, purpose, fulfillment, commitment and value [which] children bring to life," they simultaneously feel that "the constant vigilance and the tedium of occupying children who are unreasonable and self-centered takes its toll" (p. 861-862). Analyses measuring frequency counts of mothers' positive and negative interactions with their children would be interesting to compare with verbal accounts and journals of those interactions.

(6) Both groups of mothers described experiencing reduced stress, as well as greater flexibility with free time, as a result of not being employed full time. The full-time stay-at-home mothers specifically mentioned appreciating their opportunity to "create their own hours" in a sense, determining when they will do housework or go to appointments. They also felt that being home full

time allowed them the flexibility to spontaneously do fun things with their children that were not planned in advance. The part-time group particularly appreciated the flexibility of their part-time work schedules because they could still spend much of their week with their children: they seemed to believe that part-time employment is inherently more flexible than full-time work. These findings concur with findings from Waldfogel (1997) suggesting that many mothers reduce their hours at work so they can have more time with their children.

(7) The full-time stay-at-home mothers frequently mentioned that motherhood can be a difficult and tedious job, largely because of the monotonous daily routine of bottles, diapers, and housework. Additionally, many full-time stay-at-home mothers mentioned receiving some negative comments from people regarding the stay-at-home mother role insinuating that they were *just* stay-at-home mothers who were lazy, had no career aspirations, and “simply ate bon-bons and watched soap operas all day.” Zimmerman (2000) also conducted interviews with stay-at-home mothers and similarly found that they reported feeling devaluated by society because they were “wasting their educations” by being home with their children and not doing more “challenging” work. It would be interesting to assess how much of these mothers’ reported feelings of being “second-class” or not respected in society are due to perceptions and personal feelings of self-worth rather than to actual social pressure. This finding is also important for family therapists, who need to understand the social pressures many stay-at-home mothers face so they can help avoid or eliminate further perpetuation of popular stereotypes about women who stay at home.

(8) Most of the full-time stay-at-home mothers said they are not able to “get out” of the house and away from household routines and child rearing responsibilities as much as they would like. However, many of these mothers also pointed out that they eventually had to learn to “take care of themselves” by relaxing when their children are napping or when they have gone to bed for the night; others said they are able to do things for themselves when their children were with them, such as gardening or jogging. Many authors have suggested that mothering and housework “confine mothers

to home” (Thompson & Walker, 1989, p. 861). While the mothers I interviewed certainly agreed with this point, I was surprised by the number of mothers who described feeling happy to spend their “free time” with their children nearby. Space maps of mothers’ daily contact and interactions with their children would be fascinating for future research and provide a greater understanding of exactly how much time mothers spend one-on-one with their children on a daily basis.

(9) Many mothers in the full-time stay-at-home group described occasionally feeling a sense of isolation, lack of connection, and moments in which they long to talk to other adults. To deal with these feelings, some mothers participated in adult-oriented groups and activities, such as exercise groups (equipped with child care facilities for children), book discussion groups (held in the evenings when fathers can watch the children), or volunteering. Perhaps the greatest source of adult interaction these mothers experience occurs in formal and informal parent-child playgroups. Talking with other parents from these groups not only provides them with adult interaction, but it allows them to exchange personal child rearing experiences with other mothers, which they believe is an invaluable source of information. This finding strongly adheres to findings by Bell and Ribbens (1994) and Dyck (1992) who described samples of mothers who had strong social support networks with other mothers who provided them with conversation and information relating to “mothering work.” Clearly the present research, along with the research by Dyck and Bell and Ribbens challenges the popular idea of the “isolated housewife.” Future studies must continue to address this topic and even challenge social stereotypes; therapists should be aware of the social networks available for mothers and even help to expand mothers’ social opportunities if needed or desired. Finally, future research should also assess whether employed mothers have the same opportunities as stay-at-home mothers to exchange mothering and child rearing information with other mothers.

(10) Although most of part-time stay-at-home mothers said they believe their children receive great educational and social benefits from attending daycare, they also described how at times their children do not want to go to their child care facilities or their babysitters’ homes, causing these

mothers to feel guilt, concern, and sadness. Authors such as Eyer (1996) and Hays (1996) believe such feelings of guilt are largely socially constructed from images of “good mothering” permeating our society. Specifically, these authors believe that child rearing authors such as T. Berry Brazelton or Dr. Spock teach that mothers should be completely devoted to their children’s well-being. Some authors even suggest that the “ideal” mother should not work at all. If these images are truly the norm of “ideal” mothering present in our society, then clearly many working mothers—even mothers who work part-time—would feel guilt for not living up to society’s expectations. The mothers in the current research also mentioned placing great effort on finding the right child care provider for their children, which may indirectly be an attempt to find a child care provider that resembles the “good” mother icon. Future research should examine the relationship between a mother’s personal ideal of “good” mothering and the type of child care provider she selects for her children.

(11) The full-time stay-at-home mothers frequently discussed believing they provide greater love and attention for their children than daycare providers could. One mom described being “sacrificially devoted” to her children, something no daycare provider could be (Kalleen), while another suggested that her children would not appreciate how “special, unique, valuable, and capable they are” if they attended daycare (Sally). Many mothers in the full-time group also seemed to believe they are better at guiding their children’s moral and cognitive growth than daycare providers could be. Although this finding may again reflect social images of “good” mothering, little research has specifically examined the various factors—including both social norms and other belief systems, like religion—that influence mothers’ decision to stay at home with her children. Again, our field is in dire need of research that specifically analyzes belief systems. Of course this type of research would necessitate a strong qualitative component, which though time consuming and expensive, would provide massive amounts of information that would add greater depth to our understanding of motherhood and mothering.

(12) Both groups of mothers agreed that a “good” mother loves and teaches her children, is patient, fun, firm, and fair, and does not verbally or physically abuse her children. However, these mothers also seem to recognize that no mother achieves the “ideal” and that different mothers engage in different styles of parenting. One mother even suggested that it does not matter whether mothers work outside the home or not, as long as they do “whatever keeps them stimulated mentally, and keeps them fresh and optimistic” (Carol). This seems to challenge Eyer’s (1996) idea that all mothers feel pressure to achieve a similar ideal of “good” mothering, as it is often portrayed in popular child rearing texts. Future research certainly needs to examine how our socially-constructed image of “good” mothering has evolved in the past decade or even the past 5 years. I suspect that an increasing number of mothers have become more “realistic” in their expectations of themselves and that the idealized “good” mother of the nineties be changing. Most of these mothers also mentioned having personal “role model mothers” including their mothers, mother-in-laws, friends, or even a mixture of several people, and both groups of mothers said they evaluated their personal mothering performance according to their children’s behavior, watching other mothers, or reading parenting books and magazines. Qualitative studies examining the major content found in the most current child rearing texts, as well as mothers’ detailed descriptions of “good” mothering and mothering “role-models” would also further our understanding of the social construction of motherhood.

(13) Almost every mother I interviewed, including mothers from both the full-time and part-time groups, described having a “good” or “pretty good” relationship with their spouses; they frequently talked about experiencing trust, respect, fairness, good communication, and relative equality in their marriages. It is likely that social desirability influenced these mothers’ descriptions of their marriages. Although I did use a quantitative measure of marital satisfaction, it only provided a description of these mothers’ feelings of marital satisfaction; furthermore, there was little variability in the 14 scores I obtained. Future research needs to continue to work to find more effective and valid means of gaining personal information about marriages. Unfortunately, this often requires long-term

involvement with couples, which can often be quite expensive. Additionally, most of the mothers in both groups felt their husbands understood and appreciated their role as full-time or part-time stay-at-home mothers. Research has not thoroughly addressed whether perceptions of a spouse's appreciation for the mothering role influence one's satisfaction with that role or with life in general. Quantitative, large-scale studies measuring these variables would be helpful.

(14) Interestingly, most of the part-time mothers implied that they, rather than their husbands, stay at home with the children because they believe they are better-equipped. Specifically, some of the full-time stay-at-home mothers mentioned having the "proper plumbing" to feed their infant children, and most said they had more patience with their children than their husbands. As a whole, this group of mothers seems to believe that mothers are more effective than fathers at the stay-at-home parenting role. Although this may be a controversial belief, it is strongly related to gender-role ideologies popular among a large number of men and women in American society. Additionally, the full-time stay-at-home mothers believe that a career is extremely important to their spouses' identity, while for them work was never really that important. One mother said, "For me, my jobs were just that: jobs. They never really were something that I was driven to do" (Adrianna). This finding resonates with a review of the research by Thompson and Walker (1989) in which the authors state, "Women typically say, 'Work is what I do, not what I am,' while men typically offer their occupation first when asked, 'Who are you?'" (p. 850), as well as other research which indicates that working mothers are more likely to interrupt their careers for mothering responsibilities and to consider the needs of their family when deciding to enter or leave the work force as well as when choosing the number of hours and at what times they will work (Sicherman, 1996; Friedman, 1991). Clearly modern-day gender-role identities continue to be influenced by the "normal" family of the past in which mothers stayed at home while their husbands worked. Family therapists would do well to help couples to realize how social norms relating to gender roles influence their own decisions about

whether one or both members of a couple should be employed, as well as their individual responses to the employment and household work performed by their spouse.

(15) Most of the part-time stay-at-home mothers said that they, rather than their husbands, chose to work part-time because they had a greater desire to spend time with their children and do things in the house, because their husbands prefer to work outside the home, and because their husbands earn more money. Although their attribution for the mother part-time/father full-time employment decision seems to be largely based on preference, gender roles likely have an influence on these mothers' decision to work part time. Perhaps these mothers believe a mother should be more involved with her children, or maybe they look to the examples provided by their own mothers who may have worked part time or stayed at home full time. Future research should more carefully measure gender-role ideologies among informants, as well as obtain more detailed information about their families of origin. It is also possible that the part-time stay-at-home mothers in this study tended to have more liberal gender-role attitudes than the full-time group, which may explain why they do not stay at home full time. Research shows that gender-role ideologies have become less traditional over time as more women enter the work force (Spain & Bianchi, 1996); future research should continue to decipher the relationship between gender-role ideologies and employment status.

(16) Most of the full-time stay-at-home mothers indicated they do the bulk of household tasks, particularly indoor tasks, while their husbands tend to take care of maintenance and outdoor work. This finding is completely in line with past research by several authors (i.e., Blair & Johnson, 1992; Bianchi, 1995; Mederer, 1993; Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). The majority of the full-time stay-at-home mothers also said they believe that housework is part of their 40-hour/week job and that they therefore should do more housework than their husbands. However, they also described having moments when they wish their husbands would help more with household tasks, particularly without being asked. Interestingly, many of these mothers also expressed a sense of ownership over the household domain. These mothers described their husbands' assistance with household tasks as

“pitching in,” a term that connotes helping rather than doing one’s rightful share. Family therapists and marriage educators have an important role in helping couples understand and dissect potential gender-related feelings of ownership toward various aspects of household work or employment outside of the home.

(17) Among the part-time stay-at-home mothers there appears to be a more equal division of household labor and child rearing responsibilities. Many of these mothers described splitting household tasks with their spouses according to what they “like and don’t like”; several said their husbands help cook regularly, wash toilets, and do laundry and dishes. Again, this difference between the two groups may be due to more liberal gender-role ideologies among the part-time group. However, the part-time stay-at-home mothers, like the full-time group, did show feelings of “ownership” for household tasks, a more typically feminine realm. Again, future research examining stay-at-home mothers would do well to ask more in-depth questions assessing gender-role attitudes and how these attitudes relate to the division of household labor.

(18) Mothers from both groups indicated they were the “primary parent” and said their children generally come to them, rather than to their fathers, for help. While many mothers found this frustrating at times, most assumed their children were more “used to” the way that their mothers do things. Other research has similarly shown that regardless of employment status mothers are primarily responsible for their children, often needing to leave work to care for ill children (Bianchi, 2000; Zimmerman & Addison, 1997). Couples can be benefited by this finding as therapists help fathers to understand how mothers may be socially pressured to make large sacrifices for their families, sacrifices which may hurt their careers and result in resentment on the part of women; and simultaneously help mothers to “let go” of their often-controlling stance related to childrearing so that fathers can feel a greater sense of participation with their children.

(19) Finally, many of the mothers I interviewed in both groups expressed clear desires and plans for the future. A majority of mothers in both groups want housekeepers and eventual financial

stability, and most would like to continue working part-time or find a family-friendly full-time job to employ them once their children are in school so they can be available to attend their children's activities. Two mothers said they may never work again because they would like to continue to be completely available to their children. Little or no large-scale research has addressed whether other stay-at-home mothers hope to continue to avoid demanding careers and choose instead part-time or family-friendly jobs that would enable them to be available for their children. It would be interesting to see if there is perhaps a trend in this direction among modern-day stay-at-home mothers.

Of these nineteen findings, three are particularly important for future research. First, as I explained, this research suggests that many part-time stay-at-home mothers believe it is economically "necessary" for them to work in order to maintain a personally desirable standard of living or simply to meet their financial obligations. In contrast, the full-time stay-at-home mothers in this study seem to feel a sense of pride that they make financial sacrifices in order to be able to stay at home with their children. Future research should strive to obtain detailed analyses of couples' and families' beliefs regarding income and expenditure of income, as well as the tactics they utilize to effectively balance their budgets and survive financially as single-income or dual-income families. Additionally, research should address how personal definitions of "sacrifice" and ideal parenting coincide with financial spending practices.

Second, future research must address popular biases that stay-at-home mothers are "isolated housewives" who experience little social contact. As this research showed, many mothers have supportive social networks comprised largely of other mothers. Research should also examine how other support networks, such as with extended family systems, community resources, volunteering, or other organizations influence mothers' feelings of self-worth and their satisfaction with marriage, parenting, and life in general. Furthermore, studies should address the sources of social support available to and utilized by women employed full-time or part-time.

Third, and finally, social science research must continue to examine popular images of “good” mothering available through literature and the media, and evaluate whether such images resonate with actual mothers’ beliefs regarding “good” mothering. Additionally, longitudinal studies may provide some assessment of how changing conceptions of “good” mothering influence mothers’ beliefs about motherhood over time, as well as how social norms interact with the natural changes all mothers experience across the lifespan. This is important to understand because it has an enormous influence on gender-role stereotypes within families and within society in general, influencing the division of household labor and childrearing responsibilities. Furthermore, the guilt associated with not living up to ideals of “good” mothering also may be linked to depressive symptoms experienced by many mothers. Deconstructing these social pressures may provide a means through which more women can feel a greater sense of freedom to make choices regarding their lives.

Limitations of This Research

The results of this research are limited to a unique population because the mothers interviewed for this study were all married, middle-class, and had obtained college educations, and their children were all age 5 or younger. Additionally, this is a purposive sample and these findings may not generalize even to a similar group of mothers. However, generalizability is not usually a specified goal for qualitative research. Maxwell (1996) explains,

External generalizability is often not a crucial issue for qualitative studies. Indeed, the value of a qualitative study may depend on its lack of external generalizability, in the sense of being representative of a large population; it may provide an account of a setting or population that is illuminating as an extreme case or ideal type. (p. 97)

I would argue that all or part of the results of this research are transferable to other groups of stay-at-home mothers who fit a similar profile. Nevertheless, future research would do well to use this research as a springboard for the generation of theories and hypotheses which can be addressed both qualitatively and quantitatively, as well as on both small and large scales. Only through a melding of various types of research can the social science field truly move forward. Additionally, future

research should increase transferability or generalizability of these findings by measuring low-income, non-White informants who come from non-nuclear, single, cohabitating or divorced families.

Conclusion

The married, college-educated stay-at-home mothers interviewed for this study provided a coherent, in-depth overview of the phenomena of full-time and part-time stay-at-home mothering through in-depth one-on-one interviews. Specifically, the mothers discussed their experiences relating to the perceived positives and negatives of stay-at-home mothering, the decision to stay at home either full-time or part-time, experiences with child care, images of “good” mothering, having social contact and “me time,” interactions within the marital relationship, division of household labor and gender roles, and desires and plans for the future. Mothers in both groups reported an overall sense of satisfaction regarding their mothering and work-mothering roles, providing important information that can guide future research and assist family therapists in their practices. It is important for future researchers to continue to utilize qualitative research methods when studying stay-at-home mothers, as well as other types of mothers, so we can more clearly understand the personal meaning and significance modern-day mothers of all types attach to motherhood and mothering. Additionally, future research should focus particularly on couples’ and families’ perceptions regarding the “necessity” or “sacrifice” associated with being either dual-income or single-income families, stay-at-home mothers’ various social support networks, and how historically evolving images of “good” mothering influence mothers throughout the lifespan.

APPENDIX A. LETTER TO INFORMANTS

[Iowa State University letterhead]

Date

Dear _____,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview focusing on your thoughts and feelings about motherhood. I look forward to talking with you and to hear about your experiences. I am sending this letter to tell you a little about myself, to let you know about the nature of my dissertation research, and to tell you what you can expect when we meet for our interview.

Like you, I am a mother. My first child was born in the Spring of 2001, and since then I have been amazed at how my life has changed. It has been an interesting experience to juggle school and family obligations as I strive to finish my Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Studies at Iowa State University. I have gained a new respect for mothers and their unique challenges and opportunities.

I have often thought about the roles mothers perform in their daily lives and how they feel about those roles. I have found that other researchers have also been interested in this topic. Many studies have measured mothers' feelings about motherhood through the use of questionnaires that focus on things such as psychological well-being or satisfaction with the division of household tasks between husbands and wives. Although such research has been helpful, I feel that studies like these do not capture mothers' feelings in a holistic way.

In order to gain more in-depth information about mothering, I will be interviewing several mothers. I am especially interested in talking with mothers who have obtained college degrees, and who have chosen to postpone full-time careers in order to spend more time with their children.

As agreed during our telephone conversation, we will be meeting for our interview on _____. The interview will last approximately 90 minutes. You will have the opportunity to tell me in your own words what motherhood has been like for you. The interviews will be audio-taped. At the time of the interview, I will also ask you to complete a questionnaire measuring self-esteem, aspects of satisfaction, as well as general demographic information. Within a month after our interview, I will mail you an interview summary which you can change in any way that would make the summary more accurate. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Your responses will remain completely confidential; my major professor and I are the only people who will listen to the audio tapes of the interviews and view the questionnaires. Your name will be changed for all written materials associated with this research.

Once again, thank you! I would be happy to answer any questions you might have concerning this research. Contact me at home (572-4612) or email me (jriday@iastate.edu).

Sincerely,

Jennifer D. Riday, M.S.
Graduate Student

Sedahlia Jasper Crase, Ph.D.
Major Professor

APPENDIX B. SCRIPT INVITING INFORMANTS TO BE INTERVIEWED

Hi, this is Jennifer Riday, a friend of _____. I was talking with _____ and she suggested you might be interested in participating in a research study I am conducting. Do you have a minute to talk? (If not, ask to call back at a more convenient time). I am doing a project called "First and Foremost, I'm a Mom" which I hope will help me understand the feelings and experiences of mothers who either stay at home full time or who work part time. _____ said you are a stay-at-home mother/mother who works part time who she thought might enjoy sharing your experiences. Would it be alright if I tell you about my project?

I am a Ph.D. student in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at Iowa State University. For my dissertation project I am interested in talking with several stay-at-home mothers/mothers who work part time. I am a mother of a 1-year-old and I am looking forward to doing this project so I can learn from others who are doing something similar to me. I am planning on interviewing several mothers from the Ames area, as well as administering a questionnaire measuring self-esteem, satisfaction, and a few demographic variables. Participation in the study should take about 90 minutes. The interviews will be audio-taped; only my major professor and I will listen to the tapes. Following the project, the tapes and questionnaires will be destroyed. No individual names will be associated with either the interviews or the questionnaires; pseudonyms will be used instead of real names. I would like to invite you to participate in this project. I have interviewed other mothers already and they seem to enjoy sharing their experiences. Participation is completely voluntary and all responses are confidential. Are you interested in participating in an interview?

NO: Alright. Is there a particular reason why you would prefer not to participate? I understand. Thank you. Goodbye.

YES: Great! Before we finalize things, however, I need to ask you some questions to see if you are eligible to participate in this project. There are no right or wrong responses. I am just trying to locate specific types of mothers who match a certain profile [explain criteria]. Not being selected does not mean that your experiences with motherhood are not important; rather, you simply do not match the demographic characteristics of the sample I am trying to locate at this time. Do you have any questions? Please respond to the following questions: Could you tell me the ages of your child or children? Are you married? Would you describe yourself as lower-, middle-, or upper-socioeconomic class? Do you have a college degree? Are you currently in school? Do you work part time? (If Yes): How many hours do you work outside the home each week?

NOT ELIGIBLE: Thank you for answering my questions. It sounds like you would provide great information for an interview; however, at this time I need to limit my study to a specific group of mothers who match a specific profile. I have enjoyed talking with you.

ELIGIBLE: Could we set up a time for an interview? We can have the interview at your home if you like, or we can meet somewhere else. Do you have a preference? [time/place selected]. I will send you a letter describing my project and reminding you of the time we will meet. If you have any questions, please call me at home at 572-4612 or email me at jriday@iastate.edu. If something comes up and you are not able to meet, please let me know. Could I get your address so I can mail you the letter? Thank you for talking with me. I am excited to meet you and get to know you! Good bye.

APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW GUIDE

GRAND TOUR

- *What do you say when others ask you, "What do you do? Are you employed?"
- *What is it like to be a stay-at-home mother/mother who works part time?
- *How do you feel about being a stay-at-home mother/mother who works part time?

MINI TOUR***Deciding to Stay at Home Full Time or Work Part Time***

- *What do you think life is generally like for most mothers who work? Who stay at home?
- *What influenced your decision to be a stay-at-home mother?
- *What are the pros/cons of being a stay-at-home mother/mother who works part time? *Why do you, rather than your husband, stay at home with the children/work part time?
- *Are there things your children gain/lose from being with you rather than in daycare?
- *What was your life like before you began to stay at home full time/work part time?
- *What changes, if any, have occurred in your life since you began staying at home with your children/working part time? in your relationship with your husband? with extended family? with friends? with others

Daily Life

- *What is a typical day like for you?
- *What do you do in your free time?
- *During a typical day, what do you enjoy?
- *What is challenging during a typical day?
- *What, if anything, do you wish you could change about your daily experiences?
- *Walk me through the last (a) humorous (b) rewarding (c) frustrating situation that recently happened.

The Self

- *What do you think about yourself?
- *What do you think an ideal mother is like? (b) Do you have a role model?
- *Do you ever compare yourself to other mothers?
- *Do you feel you are a good mother? How do you measure "good"?
- *What are your life priorities, from most important to least important?
- *Have you personally changed since you became a full-time mother? If so, how?
- *What roles do you fill in your life right now?

Others' Perceptions/Interactions With Others

- *What do others say/feel about you staying home full time/working part time? Your husband? extended family? friends? other acquaintances?
- *Describe your marriage relationship.
- *Tell me about how you and your husband divide household tasks.
- *Do you and your husband have specific family roles? Tell me about them.
- *Describe your relationship with your children.

The Future

- *What do you think your life will be like in the future?
- *What, if anything, do you hope for yourself in the future? For your family?
- *What do you see yourself doing when your children are all in school? All raised?

CONCLUSION

- *Is there anything we haven't discussed that you would like to share?
- *How would you summarize your experiences as a stay-at-home mother/mother who works part time?

APPENDIX D. DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Please read and respond to each question. This information will provide a general overview of the mothers who participate in this research. If you do not understand an item, please ask.

Name _____

1. What is your age in years? _____

2. What is your highest level of education?

_____ AA or equivalent 2-year degree

_____ BS/BA

_____ some graduate school

_____ Master's

_____ Ph.D.

_____ M.D., D.O., D.D.S., D.V.M.

_____ J.D.

_____ Other (please explain): _____

3. Please list the sex and age of each of your children.

Sex (M/F) _____ Age _____

Sex (M/F) _____ Age _____

Sex (M/F) _____ Age _____

Sex (M/F) _____ Age _____

Sex (M/F) _____ Age _____

Sex (M/F) _____ Age _____

4. How many years have you been married to your current spouse? _____

5. How old is your spouse? _____

6. Please list your spouse's highest education level.

_____ some high school

_____ GED

_____ high school diploma

_____ some college

_____ AA or equivalent 2-year degree

_____ BS/BA

_____ some graduate school

_____ Master's

_____ Ph.D.

_____ M.D., D.O., D.D.S., D.V.M.

_____ J.D.

_____ Other (please explain): _____

7. What is your spouse's occupation? _____

8. Do you currently live with your spouse? _____

9. Have you been married prior to your current marriage?

☐ Yes
☐ No

10. What is the estimated yearly (annual) earned income for your entire household in the calendar year 2001? (Please include all sources of income in your estimation.)

☐ \$0 to \$9,999
☐ \$10,000 to \$19,999
☐ \$20,000 to \$29,999
☐ \$30,000 to \$39,999
☐ \$40,000 to \$49,999
☐ \$50,000 to \$59,999
☐ \$60,000 to \$69,999
☐ \$70,000 to \$79,999
☐ \$80,000 to \$89,999
☐ \$90,000 to \$99,999
☐ \$100,000 or over

11. Are you currently employed outside the home? _____

If yes, how many hours do you work outside the home each week? _____

If yes, what is your occupation? _____

12. Please briefly describe your employment history before the birth of your first child.

12. Please briefly describe your employment history since (after) the birth of your first child.

13. Would you describe yourself as religious? _____ as spiritual? _____

If yes, please briefly describe your religious and/or spiritual orientation:

Thank you for responding to these questions! ☺

APPENDIX E. ROSENBERG SELF-ESTEEM SCALE (RSE)

Please record the appropriate answer for each item, depending on whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with it.

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Agree

4 = Strongly agree

- _____ 1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
- _____ 2. At times I think I am no good at all.*
- _____ 3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
- _____ 4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
- _____ 5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.*
- _____ 6. I certainly feel useless at times.*
- _____ 7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.
- _____ 8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.*
- _____ 9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.*
- _____ 10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

***reverse coded items**

APPENDIX F. KANSAS PARENTAL SATISFACTION SCALE (KPS)

For each of the following questions please indicate your satisfaction by recording your answer in the space to the left of the item. Use the following scale to indicate your response.

- 1 = Extremely dissatisfied**
- 2 = Very dissatisfied**
- 3 = Somewhat dissatisfied**
- 4 = Mixed**
- 5 = Somewhat satisfied**
- 6 = Very satisfied**
- 7 = Extremely satisfied**

- _____ 1. How satisfied are you with the behavior of your children?
- _____ 2. How satisfied are you with yourself as a parent?
- _____ 3. How satisfied are you with your relationship with your children?

APPENDIX G. KANSAS MARITAL SATISFACTION SCALE (KMS)

For each of the following questions please indicate your satisfaction by recording your answer in the space to the left of the item. Use the following scale to indicate your response.

- 1 = Extremely dissatisfied**
- 2 = Very dissatisfied**
- 3 = Somewhat dissatisfied**
- 4 = Mixed**
- 5 = Somewhat satisfied**
- 6 = Very satisfied**
- 7 = Extremely satisfied**

- _____ 1. How satisfied are you with your marriage?
- _____ 2. How satisfied are you with your husband as a spouse?
- _____ 3. How satisfied are you with your relationship with your husband?

APPENDIX H. SATISFACTION WITH LIFE SCALE (SWLS)

Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

- 1 = Strongly disagree**
- 2 = Disagree**
- 3 = Slightly disagree**
- 4 = Neither agree nor disagree**
- 5 = Slightly agree**
- 6 = Agree**
- 7 = Strongly agree**

- _____ 1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
- _____ 2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
- _____ 3. I am satisfied with my life.
- _____ 4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
- _____ 5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

APPENDIX I. MEMBER CHECK INSTRUCTIONS

Dear _____,

Thank you for participating in an interview! I had fun getting to know more about you. You provided me with some valuable information for my research on mothers.

I have enclosed a copy of a summary I wrote of the interview. I would like you to read it in order to check its accuracy. This is an important process to ensure that I understood your thoughts and feelings correctly. Please write in the margins of the summary or on the enclosed blank paper in order to clarify or change anything I misunderstood. Feel free to add to, delete, and change any portion of the summary so that it will correctly and completely describe your experience as a mother who stays at home full time or a mother who works part time.

I will call you in the next few days and then set a time when I can stop by and pick up the corrected summary. I really appreciate your help with this project. Your insight and experiences with mothering will add important insight into what mothers of the 21st century are experiencing in their daily lives.

If you have any questions, please call me at home (572-4612) or email me (jriday@iastate.edu). Thanks again for your help! I look forward to reading your response to the summary.

Sincerely,

**Jennifer Riday, M.S.
Graduate Student**

**Sedahlia Jasper Crase, Ph.D.
Major Professor**

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